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BEADLE'S Dime Dialogues, No. 17.

LITTLE FOLKS' SPEECHES AND DIALOGUES.

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THE BEAR-HUNTER;

OR,

DAVY CROCKETT AS A SPY.

BY HARRY HAZARD,

Author of the following Dime Novels:

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THE BEAR-HUNTER;

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CHAPTER I

A DAY OF ADVENTURES.

"THE island yender seems a likely place for a bit of water—and from the way I feel down here, it's jest about time to fodder up," and one hand of the speaker rested lightly upon that region encircled by the leather belt.

It was high noon of an October day; bright and warm—though a cooling breeze tempered the heat of the sun's rays. A single horseman was traversing one of the comparatively level timber prairies irrigated by the head-waters of the Trinity river and its numerous confluent.

The traveler was a peculiar-looking man; tall, well-built, apparently in the prime of life, though his long hair and beard were but faintly streaked with gray. He bestrode a large, raw-boned horse, awkward and ungainly, yet possessing no mean qualities of speed and endurance. A horse-blanket, tightly rolled, was strapped to the cantle; bear-skin holsters protected a brace of heavy pistols; a long rifle, very valuable, if only from the numerous ornaments of gold and silver with which the stock was almost covered, rested across the rider's thighs; a long, broad-bladed butcher-knife crossed his left hip. A coon-skin cap, its barred tail mingling with the long iron-gray locks that floated in the fresh breeze; a loose frock or hunting-shirt of dark-green stuff, secured at the waist with a belt of untanned leather; tight-fitting nether garments of buck-skin, meeting plain, serviceable moccasins, completed the picture.

"It's worse than hunting b'ar in a Tennessee canebrake!

Two days now I've bin trampoosin' these perairies, and no game tree'd yet. The clouds up yender, 'd be easier found than this two-legged Cloud," muttered the traveler, disgustedly, as he neared the "timber island," his keen eyes closely scrutinizing the covert.

His soliloquy abruptly ended, and as if involuntarily his hand pressed hard upon the bridle-rein, while a rapid change swept over his strongly-marked features. But then—so quickly that the change might easily be attributed to the shying of the horse, a prick of the spur accelerated the animal's pace.

Rising in his stirrups, the traveler, shading his eyes with one bronzed hand, gazed earnestly *beyond* the *motte*; then bending forward, he urged his horse on past the timber. He no longer thought of seeking water in that *motte*, though his throat was parched and feverish with thirst.

In constant training from boyhood, his keen eye had detected human presence within the timber; the head of at least one man peering through the underbrush at him, over the glistening barrel of a rifle or musket. And in Texas, at that day, a stranger was considered an enemy until he had proved himself a friend.

As he darted past the point of timber, the traveler heard a faint crackling sound even above the quick *thud* of his animal's hoofs, and glancing back, with 'beard on shoulder," he saw a jet of smoke issue from the *motte*. At the same instant a spiteful report came to his ear, and then a hot, burning sensation filled his left side.

With a shrill, almost human cry of agony, the big horse rearing, pawed the air convulsively with its fore-feet, then with one spasmodic bound forward, fell to the ground in a lifeless heap, the traveler rolling over the grass half a score feet away.

All this had been nearly instantaneous. Less than one minute from the first suspicion, the traveler was sprawling over the prairie grass in any thing but a graceful position, the blood freely staining his dark tunic.

A horseman partly emerged from the timber, though half-concealed by the dense undergrowth, and as he pressed eagerly toward the fallen forms, the smoking rifle in his hands

proved that he had fired the shot. But then instead of advancing, he uttered a little cry and abruptly backed deeper into his covert.

The reason of this move was evident. Even while the little cloud of dust floated upon the air, the traveler rolled swiftly over and over until behind the body of the big horse, and then a black muzzle covered the *motte*.

That our friend was one not wholly unused to danger, was plain from his prompt movements, after his heavy fall. And now his dark eyes burned with a deadly light as he keenly scrutinized the covert before him.

A truly narrow escape had been his. The ambush shot had been well enough aimed, but in turning to glance back, our friend had thrown his body nearly out of line, just as the trigger was pulled. So, instead of perforating his body, the bullet passed between his side and arm, just cutting through the skin, and then buried deep in the brain of the big horse.

Not a sound came from the *motte*. All was still as death. With rifle ready, the traveler so unceremoniously dismounted, keenly peered over the still quivering body of the horse. And then anger, added to the smarting of his wound, loosened his tongue.

"Whoop-ee! why don't ye show up, ye or'nary bush varmints? Step out an' measure claws 'th the two-legged b'ar of Mulberry Fork! One—two—half a dozen—old Davy don't take water from no livin' critter!"

But no answer came to Crockett's unique challenge; for our traveler was indeed none other than that eccentric hero. And then, from beyond the island, he heard the rapid thud of a horse's hoofs beating the hard prairie in rapid flight.

Springing to his feet, Crockett darted to the point of timber, without thought that this might be a *ruse* of the enemy. His long rifle rose to a level, as he beheld the form of a horseman rapidly leaving the island behind, but the distance was already too great; a bullet sent in pursuit would only be wasted.

"It's the same varmint—I'll know him again, if we ever meet; and then his hide'll pay for my horse. But who war he? We've met afore—that I'll swear to; but *where*? Wish

I'd got a better look at his face," muttered Crockett, as the would-be murderer disappeared from view behind a clump of timber, a mile distant.

Thoughtfully, Crockett entered the *motte*, knowing that it no longer contained enemies, else the man would not have abandoned his prey so easily. He found where a horse had been standing for several hours ; where its owner had reclined, smoking a pipe, but no clue as to his identity.

"No water here ; I'll stow away saddle and bridle, then trudge on. Where there's so much wood, water must be nigh.

Securing his pistols, Crockett flung the now useless horse furniture into the fork of a tree, and marking the spot, turned and left the place that had so nearly proved fatal to him. Low, incoherent sentences broke from his lips, as he proceeded, and he was evidently troubled in mind.

Rounding a timber clump, he paused, and heedlessly gazed out upon the expanse opened before him. But nothing of human life was visible, though he dropped suddenly to the ground, sheltering himself behind the tall grass.

"God bless ! they'd eat good to a fellow not half so peckish as I am," he muttered, then noiselessly glided through the grass and weeds.

Half-a dozen of those noble birds—wild turkeys—were busily feeding upon the prairie, scarce two hundred yards away. And yet it was fully half an hour before Crockett was fairly within range. The experience learned while hunting the wary game in the bottoms of old Tennessee, was not forgotten here.

Hastily twisting a bunch of grass around his head, Crockett cautiously rose until his rifle covered the nearest, a fine plump hen. Noiseless as he had been, the turkeys were about to flee—standing erect, their long necks far overtopping the grass ; but as the rifle cracked, the hen-turkey fluttered over the ground with a shattered head, its fellows half-flying, half-running, skimming the prairie surface with the speed of a race-horse.

As he stooped to pick up his game, having reloaded his rifle, Crockett uttered a little exclamation and slowly scrutinized the ground. Rising erect, his gaze swept the prairie,

keenly, thoroughly. His eyes seemed filled with an unusual fire—his face, deeply bronzed, was lighted up with eager anticipation.

"A b'ar-track—and a whopper too," he muttered, as he again examined the ground at his feet. "A sweeter trail I hain't seen since I left Tennessee! Shall I—yes, it leads to water, or else the critter itself. I'll foller it—just for luck."

Nerved by hopes of meeting with his favorite game, the great bear-hunter forgot fatigue, thirst and hunger, as he followed on the trail, lifting it with the celerity of a trained hound. The unusual length of the claws, foot, stride, etc., filled Crockett with hope that the bear was a grizzly; a species with which he had never yet measured his prowess, though long anxious for the opportunity.

Half an hour's trailing brought our friend to the bank of a small stream, at a point where it wound through a small belt of timber. Quenching his thirst, Crockett sunk down in the shade to rest; and then his hunger returning, he resolved to eat first, then, if so wishing, he could follow on the trail.

A fire was speedily kindled, and lighting his pipe, Davy began leisurely plucking the turkey. Suddenly he paused, and raised his eyes, the bird dropping from his hands unheeded.

A peculiar sound met his ear—one that he had often heard in the Southern swamps; a rumbling snort or sniff. Only this was of deeper volume than any he had ever heard before.

It came from the opposite side of the stream. Directed by his ear, Crockett glanced across. Thrust through the bushes, framed in with the waving green leaves, he discovered the head and shoulders of a bear.

Even as he reached for his rifle, Crockett could not repress an exclamation of wonder at the size of the animal. The light yellowish-gray hair told him that a grizzly stood before him.

Only shifting his position enough to support the rifle, Davy Crockett, his nerves tingling with a peculiar, delirious joy, settled the silver drop full upon the glowing eye of the monster, and then the weapon spoke.

So sure was he of his aim, that Crockett never stirred, only to lay down his rifle, a noiseless laugh parting his lips. Through the thin smoke he caught sight of a grayish mass writhing upon the ground, snarling and growling with agony.

But then the grizzly rose and plunged back into the thicket. Fearing to lose his prize, after all, Davy flashed forth his knife and dashed through the stream, never once thinking of the danger he might be running headlong into. He had fought and conquered too many of the beasts, hand to hand, to think of prudence now.

Plunging into the bushes, his garments brushing the red drops from the leaves, Crockett suddenly stumbled and fell at full length over the quivering carcass of the grizzly. With ludicrous agility he scrambled aside, but then laughed loudly as he realized the truth.

"Scared at a dead b'ar! ha! ha! ha!"

Bending over his game, Crockett closely examined his prize. The bullet, true to its aim, had pierced the animal's left eye, penetrating its brain.

Forgetting his turkey in the anticipation of roasted bear-steaks, Crockett began dexterously flaying the grizzly, for once forgetting his usual prudence, though the events of that day should have taught him better.

The one glance cast around him, showed Crockett that the den of this bear was probably close at hand. A few yards away was a mass of logs and tree-tops mingled together, half-hidden by the bushes and vines that had grown up around it. A well-beaten path led from where the beast lay to the log-heap.

"Whoof!"

This sound, as nearly as letters can represent it, met the ear of the hunter, as he bent over the half-flayed carcass, causing him to spring abruptly to his feet. He had heard a similar sound but a few moments before coming from the lungs of the grizzly, and now, as he wheeled to face the direction from whence proceeded this second challenge, he beheld before him a fitting mate for the dead monster at his feet.

Its head and shoulders protruding through the leafy mass,

a huge bear glared out upon the hunter. Scarce half a score yards separated them. The massive paw, armed with long, stout claws, was slightly raised, as though to advance.

In that moment, during which the man and beast stood motionless, their gaze steadily meeting, Davy Crockett thought rapidly. He knew that an attempt at flight could only end in his destruction; the vine-covered path favored the enemy.

Crockett knew that he must fight for his life, though his weapons seemed mere playthings, little fit to be wielded against the grim monster beyond. 'Twas like the stately giraffe measuring prowess with the burly elephant.

Again came the fierce, rumbling snort. The yellowish eyes filled with an angry flame. The flabby lips were drawn back in wrinkled folds, laying bare the blood-red gums, in which were set the long, pointed, white prongs, that even now clashed together as if in anticipation.

Crockett knew that the moment was now—and knowing that naught save his own skill and courage could avail him, he prepared with lightning quickness to play his part.

The blood-stained blade was clenched betwixt his teeth. Either hand now held a pistol, whose stout brass barrels each **chambered a half-ounce ball.**

As the hunter moved, the grizzly uttered a hoarse snarl, and then its huge body parted the clinging vines. Despite his courage, Crockett could not repress a thrill of fear as he first beheld his enemy. What could the single arm of man avail against that mountain of bone and muscle?

The hammers clicked—the pistols rose to a level. The bear snarled again, as though in contempt for the struggles of his victim.

Then a loud report—a yell of rage and pain—a confused scramble.

Through the vail of hazy vapor, rapidly shifted the forms of man and beast, mingled with the flashing of crimsoned steel, the loud, quick breathing—almost gasps—that broke from the lips of the antagonists. Then, closely following the peculiar grinding that told of a steel blade encountering bone, came an almost human yell of pain.

Close beside the vine-clad bushes through which the grizzly had forced its way, crouched Davy Crockett, in one hand

the faithful blade, from whose keen point dripped red blood. Before him in the trail, half erect, struggled the grim monster, the picture of ferocity. From its claws dangled a patch of green cloth. Blood stained its dusky-gray neck. One leg was doubled awkwardly beneath its body.

As the grizzly made its rush, Crockett discharged both pistols at its head. One bullet glanced harmlessly from its thick skull, the other plowed through its wrinkled jaw, there sinking deep in the bear's throat.

Dropping the now useless weapons, Crockett seized his knife, as he nimbly bounded aside. The mad rush of the beast was thus avoided, and as the shaggy side nearly touched the hunter, a swift blow sent the keen blade deep between the grizzly's ribs.

With a snarl of pain and rage, the brute reared erect, its massive form wildly beating the air like the sails of a wind-mill. Adroitly dodging beneath the threatening masses, Davy Crockett dealt one more blow.

And as the keen steel grated against the bone, the grizzly sunk upon its haunches, with a yell of pain. True to his hope, Crockett had ham-strung the bear in one leg.

But he knew that even now it was an unequal struggle, and that little short of a miracle could carry him safely through. The monster could still move rapidly on three legs.

Its body blocked the trail leading to open ground. Behind the hunter arose the tangled mass of timber in which the grizzlies had made their home. Upon either hand the vine-wreathed bushes prevented a rapid retreat, though the huge bulk and weight of the bear could better force its way through than the hunter.

Already Crockett had felt the power of the beast in a stroke from its huge armed paw, that rent the stout woollen shirt like paper, tearing with it a patch of skin. This, though merely a graze, had nearly prostrated the stout hunter.

What then would be the result of a blow fairly delivered? Death! And no less certain would be the result should the grim monster succeed in fairly grappling with him. Those huge arms would crash the stout frame of the hunter as though he was wrapped in the folds of an anaconda.

For a moment the grizzly tried to support himself upon the disabled leg, but then, as though convinced, it sunk down upon all-fours and scrambled forward, its eyes glowing, the blood-stained foam dropping in flashes from its gaping jaws.

Though set in stern despair, the face of Crockett gave no evidence of fear, as he crouched low with limbs drawn well beneath his body. As the grizzly rolled forward, the hunter rose into the air, all his energies thrown into the leap.

With a skill attained through many a trial amid his native woods with athletic comrades, Crockett's leap carried him over the huge monster.

As its intended victim rose into the air, the bear flung up its head, snorting loudly. Crockett's toe caught against its snout, and he was thrown from his balance.

Instead of alighting fairly, Crockett was thrown forward upon his hands and knees. Fortunately the knife was not torn from his grasp.

Crockett scrambled to his feet, with a celerity lent by the danger of his situation, and whirled round. Not a moment too soon was this action.

The grizzly, though one leg was useless, had turned and was now almost within arm's-length of the hunter. And then its huge paw was leveled at the half-crouching man.

Instinctively Crockett flung up his hand, as though to ward off the blow. The bear's forearm struck his wrist with irresistible force, and the blood-stained knife was sent flying through the underbrush.

Ere he could recover himself Crockett felt the hairy arms encircle his form, drawing him irresistibly to the gory breast of the maddened brute, as he sunk back upon his haunches. And then the huge hind paw was raised, with its protruding claws, ready to disembowel the victim.

But the disabled leg gave way, and the grizzly fell upon its side. With the strength lent by despair, Crockett wrenched his arms free from the vice-like embrace, and nearly succeeded in escaping.

Raring loudly, the grizzly rose to its haunches, and once more pressed the hunter to its breast. And now the flaming eyes glared into the man's face. The hot, fetid breath seemed

to scorch his skin, turning him faint and sick at heart. The shaggy arms, with claws sinking deep into either shoulder, now tightened their grasp, and the sharp, white fangs gnashed loudly before Crockett's eyes. And then the desperate bravery that shone so bright at the *Alamo*, showed itself now.

With naked hands Crockett clutched the grizzly by the throat, and with strength that seemed more than human, fairly held back the brute's head, despite its furious struggles to free itself.

But this could not last long. Already Crockett felt his powers failing, and the great drops of perspiration rolled down his face, so violent had been his exertions.

With claws sinking deeper and deeper into his breast, the muscular paws tightened around the hunter's form, until it seemed as though he was being crushed to a shapeless mass. The bones of his frame seemed yielding. Breath came hard and in fitful gasps. His arms trembled. The head of the grizzly came slowly nearer. His eyes seemed to burn deep into the victim's brain. The white fangs gnashed loudly together, as though eager to close upon the swelling throat. The hunter felt his brain reeling. The shaggy head before him seemed to enlarge and grow even more terrible. The eyes seemed living flames. The gaping jaws belged in a vast pit of seething blood. And the angry growling rose into the deafening reverberations of thunder.

Half-unconsciously—broken and indistinct, words fell from the lips of the hunter.

"Save me!—God of Heaven!—mercy!"

As though in answer to his half-expressed prayer, a clear voice came from the edge of the little stream. Though Davy Crockett heard this, the words fell unmeaningly upon his ear, for his head sank forward, his fingers relaxed their grasp, and he lay a dead weight in the clutches of the grizzly, wholly at its mercy.

Though still holding the hunter in close embrace, the bear did not offer to harm him otherwise. Its eyes were directed toward the spot where the trail entered the open ground.

Then a deep rumbling growl broke from its lips, and Crockett slid from its relaxed grasp, falling across the dead

grizzly, seemingly as devoid of life. With lips drawn back, its huge arms pawing the air, the grizzly glared upon the man who had answered Crockett's fainting prayer.

He stood there with head and shoulders above the underbrush, a short rifle at his shoulder. Then a cloud of smoke concealed his face.

With a hoarse snarl the grizzly leaped forward, then fell to the ground, writhing and tearing the ground with its long claws. The next moment the hunter was beside it, a heavy knife flashing in the subdued light as it rose and fell with the rapidity of thought.

As quickly he sprung back, but the caution was needless. The grizzly was dead.

"A stranger!" muttered the new-comer, bending over Crockett. "Perhaps an enemy—but I'll save him if I can."

Lifting the unconscious form in his arms, he bore it to the bank of the stream, and with the cool water, soon restored Crockett's consciousness. With difficulty our friend realized the truth.

"You saved me, then, stranger?" he muttered.

"Well, yes, I suppose you might call it that, since the grizzly had you foul. But never mind that. How d'y' feel now?"

"Like I'd been run through a saw-mill. Huggin' 's good in its way—I've stood a heap in my time; but I'll swear off now," ruefully uttered Crockett, as he painfully rose to his feet.

"The scratches are not much—you'll be sound as ever in a day or two. Still you'd better let me bind them up—"

"All right—but there's no great haste. Suppose you cut a few steaks from the varmint, and we'll have dinner, for I'm more'n hungry. But—I forgot what you said your name was?"

"I'm called Tom Ashe," laughed the young man.

"And I'm Davy Crockett, sometimes called Colonel," addressed our friend, as their hands met in a warm clasp.

"What! not the Tennessee Crockett, the big bear-hunter?"

"The same, I b'lieve," laughed Crockett. "But you're too young to 've outgrown my memory. This is our first meetin'."

"Yes—but I've heard of you. Old Mr. Cloud never tires of recalling the tramps he and you have taken together—or did until lately," and Ashe drew a long breath, a shadow falling upon his bold, open face."

"You don't mean old Dan Cloud?"

"The same—he lives only a few miles from here."

"The man I've rid from Nacogdoches to see—but I begun to b'lieve I was on a wild-goose chase. He's harder to tree 'n a green swamp b'ar!" It's lucky 't I met you. But git the meat, and then we kin talk."

While the fresh bear-steaks were broiling upon the coals over which hung the fat turkey, Tom Ashe rudely bound up the scratches Crockett had received in his recent struggle for life, the veteran hunter's tongue running nimbly the while, closely questioning Tom concerning his old friend and neighbor.

"But the gal—you don't say any thing o' *her*," he added, after a time. "Hattie, I think, her name was, a 'cute little toad—she must be a beauty by this."

"Miss Cloud is beautiful—and as good as she is handsome," quickly added Tom.

"So-ho! the trail runs that way, does it? Nay, nay, my lad; never fill your heart with false shame. 'Tis no crime to love a fair girl; a true man should be proud of it."

"*They* seem to think it a crime, anyhow," bitterly added Ashe, his eyes flashing.

"They—not Hattie, I warrant?"

"I mean Mr. Cloud and his son Will."

"A black-browed, hot-headed boy, with the making of a devil in him, as I've often told old Dan. He held the lines too loose. Unless there's bin a change, the boy rules the roost, now," muttered Crockett, half to himself.

"He does. The old man fears him, I believe. There's more than one dark hint going the rounds about Will Cloud. Some say that he is one of the Frontier Wolf's band; others that he is the leader himself."

"Frontier Wolf! One would think we was back in old Car'liny by that. Bat go on—what kind of band?"

"Horse-thieves, counterfeiters—and some say murderers. Whether they are or not, they rule this section of the country pretty much as they will."

"Why don't the settlers do something?—'list under Judge Lynch?"

"It must come to that in time, for this Frontier Wolf, as he terms himself, grows bolder and more impudent with every day."

"Well, we'll talk about this some other time. Tell me now just how it stands 'tween you and Hattie. You kin trust me. I'm your friend."

"All went well enough until Will Cloud come back from the settlement. Hattie promised to be my wife; the old man gave his consent. But now he retracts it, talked over by Will. *He* hates me, because I beat him shooting, and then gave him a thrashing to pay for his insults. *Now* they threaten to shoot me on sight, if found near the house."

The two friends conversed long and earnestly, as Crockett resolved to camp out for the night, feeling too sore to travel farther. I have given all that need be recorded here of their conversation:

As night fell, they laid down beside the fire, and soon Crockett's deep breathing told that he was asleep. A few minutes later, he who had called himself Tom Ashe arose and noiselessly stole away in the darkness.

CHAPTER II.

DAVY'S PLEDGE.

WITH the first peep of day Davy Crockett opened his eyes, gazing around with a puzzled air. But then the events of the past day were remembered as a twinge of pain ran along his stiffened frame.

"Well, young Tom— Hellow!"

Crockett gazed around upon every side as the vacant couch of leafy twigs told that Ashe had arisen. But not a trace of the young hunter met his eye. The fresh, springy soil around was undented. Refreshed by the cool night air, even the blades of grass had straightened their stems.

The trained eye of the veteran hunter did not overlook this fact. At first he had believed that Ashe was near, having risen early to prepare the morning's meal. But the tiny pile of ashes was dead and cold; the grass around had not been pressed by human foot for hours.

"It's queer!" muttered Crockett, as, forgetting his soreness, he closely hunted for sign. "He left in the night—airly, too. Why didn't he tell me something of it? He promised to guide me to Cloud's ranche, this mornin'. I cain't understand it—nohow!"

Crockett found where Tom Ashe had crossed the little stream, his footprints being plainly stamped in the stiff mud. He followed them for several hundred yards, but then lost the trail. Upon the springy turf the foot of human made slight impression.

Retracing his steps, Crockett prepared his morning meal in thoughtful silence. All around was just as when he had lain down to rest the night before, save that the young man had vanished.

Suspicion of treachery never for a moment entered the veteran's mind. An enemy would never have risked his life as Ashe had done, nor would he have left his dupe unrobbed, at least the superb rifle—an invaluable prize in that wild section—would have been taken.

"Well," muttered Crockett, as he eat a hot bear-steak, "I won't puzzle my brain over it no longer. The boy'll explain it when we meet. I've traveled too much not to know a rogue's face when I see it. I'd trust him with my life."

Fortunately Crockett had gained a pretty fair idea of the location of Cloud's ranche, through the conversation with Tom Ashe, and crossing the stream, he left behind him the timber belt that had so well-nigh proved fatal to him, and pressed on over the prairie at a rapid pace. More than one grunt of pain was wrung from his lips, but gradually his limbs became more pliable and the soreness became less and less acute as he warmed to the work.

At length, standing upon a swell in the land, Crockett looked down upon a small cluster of buildings in a broad level valley, close beside a timbered river, and he

kaew that this was the home of his old friend, Daniel Cloud.

The door of the stout log-house stood open, but as Crockett approached it was closed abruptly, while from a small loop-hole to one side protruded the muzzle of a rifle. Not a little surprised at this rude greeting, Crockett removed his hat, calling out:

"Is this the way you bid good-mornin' to an old friend, Dan Cloud?"

"Keep your distance; I'm up to your devil's tricks, now!" cried out a shrill, peculiar voice, coming from the loop-hole.

"Was it a devil's trick when I tuck you from under that he-b'ar on Rutherford's Fork o' the Abion? Change o' kentry hasn't improved your mem'ry, Dan Cloud," coolly retorted the hunter.

"Who—who air you, then?"

"Davy Crockett."

The rifle barrel disappeared, the door was flung open, and a tall man sprung out, his long gray hair streaming in the fresh breeze that filled the valley. If betraying suspicion before, the settler made ample amends now, by his warm hand-clasp.

"It's ra'ly you? Lord, lord! Never 'xpected to meet you ag'in in this world!"

"I've rid many a mile jest to see you, Dan, old boy; but I'd go twic't as far to cross palms with my old pard. Bat the fam'ly—how's all?"

A sudden change passed over Cloud. The glad light died away in his eyes, his face darkened and the wrinkles seemed to deepen, while his tall form shivered like one with the ague. Crockett stared in surprise.

"Why, man, what's the matter? You look like a ghost!"

"That's a curse restin' on me, Davy," muttered Cloud, glancing nervously downward, as though dreading lest some unwelcome sight might meet his vision. "It's follered me clean here—it'll drive me to death, yit, afore my time. I see it every night—it curses me—it works ag'inst every thing I try to do; it follers me every place—it wakes me in the

night, hollerin' in my ear— Thar! see! drive it away— don't let it tetch me! Save me, Davy—fer the love o' God, save me!"

The shrill voice of the old man rose to a terrified shriek, and his tall, wasted form quivered like a storm-tossed shrub, as he clung to the stout hunter. One trembling finger pointed up the valley—a look of horror rested on his haggard features.

"Thar—thar's nothing yonder, Dan, 'cept a bush shakin' in the wind. Brace up, man, you've bin drinking too much, though it's airly in the day to be this far gone," cried Crockett, the first thrill of superstition giving way to anger.

"It's gone now—your voice skeered it away. Stay with me, Davy—I'd soon be a man ag'in ef you'd on'y stay with me. It wouldn't dare trouble me when you was nigh. You will, won't you, Davy?" and the old man's voice sank to a coaxing tremor.

"Sartin; but look here, Dan, if I'm to help you fight this devil, as you call it, you must let me be doctor. It's your old failing—the whisky-bottle."

"No, no. I have not drank a drop in two years. I don't darst do it—the devil was wuss, then. No, no, Davy, I ain't drunk. It's—it's *him*!" faltered Cloud.

"*Him*! Who's him?"

"You know—Joe Trautman."

"Oh! him you killed in a duel?"

"No—he was *murdered*!"

"But I heard it was a fa'r stand-up fight: rifles, at thirty paces; his life ag'inst your'n."

"You won't cuss me ef I tell you?"

"No, poor devil! You've bin cussed Leavy enough now. I hardly knew ye," muttered Crockett, sympathizingly.

"I'll tell ye, then; I *must* tell somebody—the warks keep burnin' on the end o' my tongue, night an' day. Many a time I've bit my lips through an' through to choke 'em back. An' they're killin' me—them an' the sight o' him with the red hole in his for'el, whar my bullet struck him!"

Clinging to the hunter, his thin lips close to Crockett's ear,

Daniel Cloud revealed the secret that had cursed his life in broken, incoherent sentences, that only Crockett's partial knowledge of the affair enabled him to understand, and in vain he strove to conceal his horror at this tale of treachery.

Years before a quarrel had arisen between the neighbors, Daniel Cloud and Joseph Trautman. A challenge followed, and was accepted. But Cloud knew that his enemy was a dead shot, and that when the chances were equal, he could not escape death. The meeting took place; shots were exchanged; Trautman fell, shot through the brain, while, to the surprise of all but one other, Cloud stood unscathed. That other was he who had loaded both rifles. Into one he placed a bullet; the other a tornwad that fell consumed, half-way between the duelists.

For his own sake this wretch kept the black secret. But from that day, Daniel Cloud was a haunted man. From spot to spot the vision of his victim followed him. The curse of Cain was upon the murderer.

"I could b'ar it better on'y it strikes at me through them who is innocent. I've tried to kill myself, thinkin' mabbe that would satisfy it—but it won't let me—it holds me back. It says that I must see them all die fast—then my time is come. It's struck twicet, a'ready. Look yender—by the tree."

"Two graves!" muttered Crockett.

"Yes—*he* made 'em. Two years gone by little Em'ly was on the hill yender pickin' strawberries. She hollered—I looked thar an' saw *it* quiled up at her feet, in the shape o' a snake, on'y 'th *his* head. They said it was a rattlesnake—but I knowed better. Then last spring Jemmy was paddlin' the canoe over to me whar I was at work. As he hollered for help, I see'd *it* raise up out o' the water an' grab my boy by the throat, upsettin' the canoe. I jumped in an' got the poor boy to land, but he was dead. Black finger marks was on his throat, though I never tetched it. It was whar *it* choked him to death. Then last night—but I didn't see *it* then. Anyhow, I know it led a hand in it. Else fer why shed they steal her away?"

"Her—steal *who* away?" suddenly cried Crockett.

"Hattie—my pet child. She's gone too," quietly added Cloud, gazing vacantly around.

"Look here, Dan Cloud," sternly uttered the hunter, his strong hand closing upon the man's shoulder; "quit your foolin' now, and be a man. Tell me what you mean. Whar is Hattie? Who stole her away? Speak out plain, or by the great b'ar o' the Rolling Fork, I'll help this spook to ha'nt you!"

"Last night a dozen men came an' made me open the door. They took an' tied both me an' the old woman. Then they kerried Hattie off, takin' to the river, es I could tell by the sound. They swore ef I tried to git free afore day, that they'd come back an' roast me alive," hurriedly explained Cloud, apparently frightened by Crockett's threat.

"Who was they? How'd you git free?"

"I worked my hands loose. See—the skin is all rubbed off. I was jest startin' out to rouse the neighbors, when you kem in sight. I thought it was them come back to kill me."

"Was they strangers, or did you know 'em?"

"Strangers—but from thar talk I b'lieve they b'longed to the gang o' hoss-thieves that uses in this neighborhood."

"The Frontier Wolf's?"

"Eh? what d' you know o' *him*?" stammered Cloud, in great amazement.

"Tom Ashe told me—"

Cloud uttered a gasping cry and shrunk back, trembling like a leaf. His face wore the same look of horror that had already so startled Crockett.

"You don't—nothing has happened to *him*?" suspiciously demanded Crockett.

"No—I don't know; 'twas n't that—*his* face looked at me over your shoulder," gasped Cloud.

"Come—the next word you say o' sech nonsense, or of *him*, blamed if I don't leave you that instant. You're necking me as big a fool as yourself," impatiently cried the hunter, browning off the peculiar thrill that seized him.

"I's go in the house, then. It don't come there often, any at night. Only the old woman's thar. Will's gone to the settlements. Ah! ef he'd bin here, this 'd never 'a' happened. He's a good boy—a brave, kind boy!"

Crockett followed Cloud into the house. The room—besides which there was but one other and the loft—looked cold and cheerless. The walls were of rough hewn logs, the intervals between being rudely chinked with blocks and clay. The furniture was scanty and of the rudest description, evidently the work of the settler and his son.

Upon a chair beside the wide fireplace, sat a woman, old, withered, with thin white hair. Her eyes turned with a vacant stare toward the door as they entered, but no look of recognition greeted the visitor.

Crockett involuntarily shrunk back, a look of pain upon his countenance. He could scarcely realize that this was the gay, beautiful girl whom he had known so well, not many years since. Scarce twenty-five years had passed, since he made one at the wedding of "the handsomest couple in the State," when Maggie was but fifteen, Daniel nineteen—both being younger than he was. And now—the change was very sad. While he was yet in his prime, they were old and decrepit. "Pretty Maggie" was a harmless maniac; Daniel was but little better.

"She won't know you, Davy," muttered Cloud, noting the glance. "She's bin so ever sence Jimmy was drowned. She don't notice nothin'—she cain't ever see it when it sets on my breast at night. But it's killin' her—the other night it told me so!"

Crockett could scarcely restrain the temptation that seized upon him—he felt that he must turn and flee from this place, which, with its occupants, seemed resting beneath a curse. Already he felt its influence, and could not help casting quick glances around, like one expecting to behold some strange and unwelcome vision.

But then, by a severe exertion of will, he banished these fantastic ideas, and closely questioned the settler as to what had occurred. Carefully sifting Cloud's rambling statement, the hunter learned this much:

Early on the day before, Will Cloud had mounted his horse and started for the settlements, on business of his own. No one—whether neighbor or stranger—had been near the ranche that day. In the night, Cloud was roused by loud knockings at the door. In answer to his queries, he was

ordered to open the door, else the house would be burned above his head. Knowing the folly of resistance—for through a loop he could see that fully a dozen men were close without—he obeyed. He was seized and bound, as was his wife. Hattie—who slept in the loft—was awakened and bidden to dress herself, unless she preferred being taken wrapped in a quilt. The leader—a tall, well-formed, dark-bearded man—assured her honorable treatment, if she acted wisely. Though sadly frightened, the maiden seemed to realize the folly of resistance, and made no vain outcry or struggles. Then threatening them with death if they stirred before day, the marauders departed. By listening, Cloud knew that they either crossed the river, or else went down it. They had no horses with them.

Such, in substance, was the tale told by the settler. In silence Crockett listened ; but his brain was busy.

Taking his rifle he left the house, followed by Cloud, and strode toward the river bank, knowing that around the house, where the ground was hard beaten, no sign could be read.

Here he set to work, bidding Cloud remain still. Foot by foot—almost inch by inch, did the hunter scrutinize the soft earth that edged the stream. Suddenly he paused and sank upon his knees. Before him lay two different sets of tracks : one nearly twice the size of the other.

The larger tracks were with the toes pointed toward the water. Close to the brink were the smaller ones, only two in number, as though, until then, the owner had been carried.

This Crockett knew had been the case. The man had set Hattie—for no other could have left those tracks—down while he entered a boat, the print of whose bow was plainly cut in the mud.

Thus far Cloud's tale was confirmed : that his daughter had been carried away by water. But only one man had passed here—where was the trail of the others ?

Searching for this, Crockett passed on, exerting to the utmost the skill he had attained hunting in the southern forests and swamps. After a time a cry broke from his lips, and hurrying forward, he again stooped low, with eager gaze bent upon the ground.

Startled by the cry, Cloud hastened to his side. But then

he shrunk back, his eyes widely dilated, a ghastly pallor overspreading his face.

"There's been murder down here!" cried Crockett, abruptly arising, his keen eyes fixed upon Cloud's face.

"Murder—yes! it was murder! Look! there—by your shoulder—save me! Ah!"

With a gasping cry the haunted settler staggered back and sank to the ground, his features horribly distorted, his limbs writhing like one in deadly agony. He was in a fit.

Crockett tore open Cloud's woolen shirt, then dragged him to the water's edge, dashing the cool element upon the distorted features with a free hand. Still trembling, Cloud opened his eyes, glancing around with the old look of sickening dread.

"This is a sad change from the man I used to know in Dan'l Cloud," muttered the hunter, wiping his brow.

"But don't think too hard o' me, Davy. If I've sinned, the Lord knows I've suffered and 'pented. But the cuss is on me—night an' day the cuss is on me!"

"Brace up—be a man. Don't give way so easy, man. But now—you said nothing 'bout hearin' a fracas out here, last night?"

"I didn't hear none—I don't think thar was any," hesitated Cloud, slowly rising from the ground.

"Easy—such a trail as this kin be read only one way. Look! A big man has passed here; he's bin dragging something heavy after him. Whether human or dumb critter, it was dragged 'long here without trying to git loose. See this spot o' blood, half wiped out? The karkidge lay here for a bit; then the big man pitched it out into the drink. Here the footprints lead back—: stay whar you air, Dan—you ain't fit for headwork, this mornin'."

Crockett, bending low down like a hound upon a scent, glided away from the water-side. He followed the broader trail: that where the body had been dragged rudely over the ground.

Along the trail blood was plentifully sprinkled. That upon the green grass and bushes shone clearly in the sunlight, though long since dry.

Below a wide-spreading oak tree, only a few score yards

from the lone cabin, Crockett found the end of his trail. Carefully and thoroughly he read the sign scattered so plentifully about.

He distinguished with certainty four different tracks. Two were those he had already measured beside the river.

The short grass was torn and trampled, stained with blood. In one spot lay a mass of congealed blood several inches broad. Upon the rough bark of the tree-trunk was the trace of a recently discharged bullet. Tearing the rough scales, the bullet had passed on into space.

Crockett saw where the woman had fled a few paces, then sunk to the ground, doubtless terrified by the struggle, which must have been desperate indeed to have left such deep marks upon the firm turf. That she had not been the victim was plain.

The sound of deep breathing close behind, startled Crockett, and he sprung erect. Daniel Cloud stood beside him, his eyes staring fixedly at the tell-tale blots of blood.

"You see—a man has bin killed here last night. Powder was burned—the bullet-scar on the tree tells that. Whoever it was, must 'a' fi't hard. Yet you say you didn't hear no fuss?" slowly uttered Crockett.

"I didn't hear nothin'. I was in thar, thed. The face war with me, floatin' before mine, a-talkin' to me. It said my time was nigh. It laughed—then said I hed looked my last on the face o' my children—that Hattie an' Will would never come back ag'in. The cuss o' blood war closin' in on me. Then I must 'a' fainted, for the next I knowed it war day."

"Look here, Dan, this is the wo'st kind o' foolishness. You must drive all sech fancies away, or you'll go plum crazy afore you know it. Here—take a horn o' this. It'll warm your spirit for a bit."

Cloud eagerly seized the proffered flask, and nearly drained its contents. As Crockett anticipated, the fiery spirit was almost immediate in its effects. The laggard face flushed, the wild, hunted look fled from the sunken eyes. The settler seemed **'another man.'**

"That's it. Now tell me all you know of this feller you call the Frontier Wolf, and why you think he took Hattie away. Speak quick—it's time we was doin' something for the child."

Cloud obeyed. The "Frontier Wolf"—a name it seemed of the outlaw's own choosing—was leader of a desperate gang, dreaded throughout that section by all honest men. They feared at will, being too powerful to fear the settlers. As yet they had shed no blood that could with certainty be traced to them, though more than one settler had mysteriously disappeared.

The Wolf had once visited Cloud's ranch, openly avowing his name, but conducted himself quietly, even insisting upon paying for the food eaten by himself and horse. He seemed deeply interested in the appearance of Hattie Cloud, passing several compliments upon her grace and beauty. His language was that of an educated man. At parting he promised Cloud immunity from his band. From policy the settler appeared grateful.

"You make the trail blinder'n ever. Why should he change so sudden? Be you sure he was the man that acted as leader last night?"

"Not sure—but I think so. I was bad skeered. Then there was no light in the house 'cept that from the fireplace. He wore a hat slouched over his face. But the voice, his figur', was the same."

"Have you any idee whar he gen'rally use?"

"Somewhar in the chaparral beyon' the big *barranca*. The ridge is some twenty mile from here. I've heard they rendezvous thar. I don't know for sure."

"That'll do for now. Mebbe I'll want more when I've fixed my plans. But—do you know any thing about a young man named Tom Ashe?"

"Tom—Ashe? What do 'you know o' him?" gasped Cloud.

Crockett started at the strange change in the tone of his friend. Again Cloud seemed the haunted wreck of a few minutes before. The flush died from his face, the hunted look returned to his eyes. His frame trembled like a leaf.

"What's the matter now?"

"The—I heard it laugh just as you spoke," faltered Cloud.

"Bah! brace up, man. 'Tis only your 'magination. But you hain't answered my question."

"Tom Ashe—well, he used to be here a good deal. He was courtin' Hattie, I b'lieve, until we found him out. He is one of the Wolf's men."

"How d' y' know?" sharply demanded Crockett.

"They say so—"

"Then they lie. But when did you see him last?"

"Not since—over a month."

"Wal, let it drop, now. You kin loan me a horse?"

"Yes—but what—"

"I'm going to try and save your gal. I've got a month or so to spar', and couldn't spend it better. The chick used to seem 'most like she was my own. I'll fetch her back, if one man kin do it."

"But thar's danger—you may git killed, or—"

"Don't, Cloud—you talk like you didn't want me to go for her! Is that your mind?" sharply.

"No—no!"

"Then you go and spread the news 'mongst the neighbors. Gether them here, but wait until you hear from me. I give you the word o' Davy Crockett that I'll fetch Hattie back, or git rubbed out in the tryin'!"

CHAPTER III.

THE FRONTIER WOLF.

It was mid afternoon when Davy Crockett reined up at the edge of the timber island from which, on the previous day, the ambushed shot had so nearly ended his career. The horse, though wet with sweat, its counter dotted with flakes of foam, seemed in no respect the worse for his long, furious gallop.

Entering the *motte*, Davy secured his own saddle and bridle, hiding those taken from the animal beside a rotting log, covering them well with leaves and twigs. Then lighting his pipe, the bear-slayer reclined at length upon the grass, deeply pondering, and, as customary with him, uttering broken sentences aloud, now and then.

"*Be* I a fool, or bain't I? to take up a strange trail—and *such* a trail! See—Dan'l says the gal was carried off by this Frontier Wolf. But he's changed so peskily that, if she wasn't railly his own da'ter, I'd sw'ar he's lyin'. Poor cuss' and I kin call back the time when he was the boldest, best hand a'ter a blar I ever knowed. But he said it; it's the curse o' blood!

"Then Tom Ashe—thar's puzzle number two. Whar's *he* gone? I'd 'a' swore he war honest to the core—only for what Dan'l said. But some one lied—*which one was it?* Tom said Will Cloud was a outlaw—mebbe the head Wolf himself; Dan'l says Ashe is one. The trail criss-crosses here, thar, everywhar, till my Bose could not foller it," and Davy puffed vehemently.

"Well, I've said it. I'll do the best I know how. For once I'll have to go ahead, whether right or wrong!"

Crockett leaped lightly into the saddle, and then rode out upon the prairie, heading toward a considerable elevation a mile distant. From the summit of this, if Cloud's instructions were correct, he would gain a sight of the forest in which Frontier Wolf made his lair.

Our hero had a plan rudely mapped out, to follow in case he could discover the outlaw, relying upon his native shrewdness to carry him safely through, more especially as he was a stranger in that section.

The animal he strode was one of Cloud's; he had ridden a little out of his way, to change saddles, that his story might have a more probable air.

From the hill-top Davy Crockett had a fair view of the chaparral, and for several minutes he sat like a statue, his gaze bent in that direction. Then a satisfied smile twinkled in his keen eyes. He had made a discovery.

Above the matted mass of the tree tops, coming from no great distance beyond the edge of the timber, a thin, fleecy vapor rose against the blue sky beyond. Only the trained eye of an old hunter would have noticed this—and hardly that, unless looking particularly for some such sign.

"It's smoke—from a fire 'most gone to ashes. But is it them I want? That I'll soon know, though."

Rolling forward, Crockett divided his glances between the

chaparral and the level surface of the prairie. In a few minutes more, a long, dark line seemed to cut the prairie, at right angles with his course.

"Dan'l didn't lie," muttered Crockett, as he reined in close to the edge of a deep *barranca*.

With sides almost perpendicular, cut down through an almost solid mass of rock, the *barranca* was full thirty feet in depth, the space between being but a trifle more. Its bottom bore evidence that during the rainy season, a torrent raged within its confines. Large bowlders lay here and there, with jagged points a little blunted where the elements had worn them. To the left, until reaching an abrupt bend, the *barranca* seemed to deepen and widen.

Turning in the opposite direction, Crockett rode along the brink. The gully lessened in depth and width, until, where a beaten trail crossed it, our friend rode over. This natural bridge was but a few yards wide. Beyond it again the *barranca* deepened, until lost to view by another abrupt curve.

Fearing to lose more time, as the sun was now low down in the west, Crockett rode rapidly on toward the timber. Reaching its edge he dismounted, and proceeded to secure his horse.

Scarcely had he accomplished this than he raised his eyes, with a quick start; but his face in no wise betrayed the natural thrill of fear that ran through his frame.

A faint rustle had reached his ear, accompanied by a sharp, metallic click; and in the one glance that he cast around, he saw that a rifle was leveled at his head. Yet only an inch or two of the dark barrel penetrated from the dense thicket, but a sunbeam fell upon the silver drop, causing it to gleam like the eye of a serpent.

Crockett thought fast in that moment of peril. He knew that before he could raise a weapon, the ambushed foe might easily drop him. Almost without thinking, these words fell clear and distinct from his lips:

"This must be the place—'f I kin only find the Frontier Wolf, then I'm safe."

Almost instantly a deep voice came from the bush that served as an ambush:

"Who are you, and why do you seek the Frontier Wolf?" then adding sharply: "Drop your rifle—raise your hands above your head! Hesitate, and down ye go!"

"I s'render; you've got the deadwood on me this time, whoever you mought chaine to be," promptly returned Davy, as he obeyed the stern order.

"You show your good sense. I never give the same order twice," and then the thicket parted, and a man stepped out before our friend, his rifle still at full cock.

With one keen glance, Davy took in the stranger's appearance, and, despite his still critical situation, a thrill of admiration filled his being. Rarely had he ever met with a more perfect specimen of manly beauty, both of body and face than this.

In height a trifle over six feet, straight as an arrow, the man was symmetry personified. His face, naturally that of a brunette, was sun-embrowned, but clear. Black hair, glossy and slightly curling, fell over his shoulders; a heavy mustache of the same raven hue shaded his well-cut mouth, without hiding the crimson, almost womanish lips. A broad-brimmed hat of soft felt rested upon his head, looped up on one side, secured by a diamond cluster pin, that sparkled and scintillated in the red rays of the setting sun. A suit of softly tanned buck-skin neatly fitted his person; an embroidered belt—the work evidently of a loving hand, from its taste and finish—supported a brace of pistols, and a heavy bowie-knife, the latter weapon at that time being by no means as common as now.

"Now then," the man added, "tell me what you meant just now by those words?"

"What words?"

"Don't bundle words with me, or you'll repent it. You spoke of the Frontier Wolf. What did you mean?" sternly.

"Look here, mister, I'm half white an' freckle'd. You call the right bower, but my left's guarded. A rifle's no shore thing at arm's-length. Unless you drop me cold, I'd mount ye afore ye could fetch another we'pon. I ain't used to bein' driv' like a sheep."

"Good! I like your plack," and the stranger uncocked his

rifle, leaning it against a bush. "Now we're equal in arms. Will you answer me?"

"Yas—beca'se you talk like a man to a man. I said I wanted to find the feller what calls hisself the Frontier Wolf. I've parnt he wur somewhar around this. I want to jine his band, partly beca'se I like his style—but more fer my own good."

"How so?"

"You see that animal? 'F you live 'round here mebbe you know him, fer he's no slouch. Well, I stole him," coolly added Crockett.

"I *do* know it. But who are you? We never met before, so I know you must be new to these parts."

"So I be. I kem from the settlements. Left rayther sudden. Feller said I cheated—we was playin' poker at Williams', in Nacogdoches. I lent him my knife. 'They talked o' a mob—lynch-law an' sech like, so I levanted. I knowed I kerried my welcome, so I sot out to hunt up this Frontier Wolf."

"Your welcome. What do you mean?"

"S'cuse me stranger, I'd rather tell him it's for, nor you."

"You can speak out—I am the Frontier Wolf!" in a proud, exultant tone of voice. "Wait—I'll prove it to you," and he raised a bone call to his lips, sending out a clear, shrill whistle.

Concealing his anxiety as best he might, Crockett awaited the result. He was not long left in suspense. In less than one minute after sounding the call, a dozen men emerged from the chaparral, bearing their weapons ready.

"Never fear, man," laughed the other, as Crockett stepped back, his hand clutching a pistol-butt. "You shall not be harmed, unless you prove a spy. Courtwright," he added, turning to one of the men, "tell this gentleman what my name and title is. Speak out."

"You're our captain—the Frontier Wolf," was the prompt reply.

"Good! you may go now—all of you. Back to the camp. Now are you satisfied?" he added, as the men vanished.

"Yas—an' here I am 'f I do say it myself, as good a man

o' my age as you kin find in 'Texas, whether fer close 'rastle or long licks, the knife or rifle, fer night-work or day-time, w' o, no longer gone than yest'day, licked two grizzlys in fa'r fight—one o' them hand-to-hand—; here I be, I say, ready, ef you say the word, to call you cap'n an' do your work as long as you treat me like a white man," promptly said Crockett.

"But this welcome you spoke of?"

"They're raisin' a band o' men in Nacogdoches an' the other settlements to come an' hunt the Frontier Wolf to his hole—then smoke him out. They's five hundred dollars sot on your head a'ready."

"Beware how you deceive me! I have a trusty spy in the settlements. He would have told me of this."

"Would I be fool enough to stick my head in your rope, then tell o' this, 'f I was the spy you think?" laughed Crockett.

A great deal more was said, but the reader has already heard sufficient to give them an idea of Crockett's plans; and the fast-crowding events that, almost from that hour, poured upon our characters, forbid unnecessary detail. Enough that the bold hunter completely hoodwinked the outlaw. Before reaching the camp, he told the Wolf how his horse had been shot, thus driving him into stealing another. And this story confirmed what the outlaw had already heard from one of his men who had fired the shot, thinking Crockett was the man for whom he was lying in wait.

However, Crockett was not to have matters all his own way. One of the outlaws, after closely scrutinizing him, advanced and called him by his real name. As the fame of the bear-killing politician was known from ocean to ocean, his name familiar as that of the President, the sensation that followed was great.

"You mistake, stranger," coolly returned Crockett, his nerve never once deserting him. "My han'le is only plain Wash Cornell."

"'F you ain't old Davy, then you're the devil," muttered the other, staggered by the new recruit's coolness.

That the Wolf's suspicions were aroused, Davy soon perceived. He was shown a rude brush hut, and told that he

must wait there until he—the captain—could find time to visit him. Knowing the folly of resistance or disobeying, Crockett submitted to his imprisonment—for that he knew it was in fact—with a good grace.

The encampment was in a small natural glade, though considerably enlarged by human hands. A dozen or more brush huts dotted the open space. Crockett had used his eyes well, and now knew that there were women near—but all that he had seen yet were either Indian squaws or Mexicans; none that could possibly answer Daniel Cloud's description of his missing daughter, Hattie.

Satisfied with his progress thus far, Crockett lay down upon the bed of dried leaves, and, despite the smarting of his wounds, soon fell asleep. When he awoke, the Frontier Wolf was standing over him, apparently trying to read his countenance.

"Well, friend Connel, you sleep sound. But do you often talk in your sleep?" he abruptly added.

Crockett bore his searching gaze with an air of stolid unconcern.

"I never laid awake long enough to find out," he dryly replied, stifling a yawn.

"Never mind now. Are you ready for work?"

"Yes—'f you say so."

"I do say so. Listen. You stole that horse from old Cloud, to-day?"

"Yas—'f that's his name."

"Very well; I believe it, but there are some of the men who doubt whether you are not a spy, instead of being what you pretend, and they demand that you be put to the test. For your own sake I know you will not refuse."

"Tell me what I've got to do," uttered Crockett, fully comprehending the meaning of the Frontier Wolf.

"Only to steal another horse—nothing more. You must do it to-night, and luckily, business calls us past the same place, so we can act as your guides. Will you stand the test?"

"Yes," promptly replied Davy, knowing that he must either steal the horse or be detected. "How soon?"

"Now. Your horse is ready, come," and the outlaw left the hut.

In vain did Davy glance keenly around the glade, searching for the maiden whom he believed to be held a captive by the Frontier Wolf. Only the dark forms of men and horses met his eyes. And then, one by one, the band filed from the little glade, following a narrow, winding trail that finally led them to the open prairie.

Leaping into his saddle, Davy Crockett glanced keenly around upon the party. There were a dozen riders in all, well mounted and heavily armed, as though for desperate work. Then the outlaw leader tapped him upon the arm.

"Keep close to me, Connel—the boys are quick-tempered, and might do you a harm, else. You understand?"

Davy did understand, and obeyed. And as they galloped over the prairie, crossing the barranca at the same point before alluded to, our friend began to seriously reflect upon his rashness in thus placing his head into a noose. The plan, too, that had seemed so simple, began to assume very different proportions.

For two hours the Wolves pressed on at a gallop, never once drawing rein. Then, nestling in a little valley, a building, long and low, became visible.

"Yonder is the place, Connel," remarked the outlaw. "In that low building to the left, your game lies. Remember, 'tis a big black stallion; that is all I care for. It may be that he is guarded; Richmond thinks nearly as much of his Morgan as of his daughter. But that is *your* affair. If you are really what you pretend, you will bring the horse here. If not—well, we will see you again. You understand?"

"I'll do the best I know," muttered Davy, leaping to the ground and gliding rapidly forward, followed by the outlaws, who, however, drew rein while several hundred yards from the buildings.

Crouching low down, Davy glided along until he gained the rear of the outbuildings, which more nearly resembled the stables to be found upon a farm in "the States," than usual to the prairies of Texas at that date. Here he squatted down, with rifle rested across his knees, and began thinking.

"Shall I, or shan't I? Turn hoss-thief in my old age, and there's likely git shot for it—that sounds nice! How do I know these fellers tuck the gal off? Only by the say of a

crazy critter. I've kep' my eyes an' ears open wide, but hain't l'arned nothing o' her. For lettle I'd— But no! I said I'd fetch her back—and Davy Crockett never goes back on his word."

No longer hesitating, our hero laid aside his rifle, and then cautiously glided around the stable. Crawling through the bars, he approached the door. This was double; the upper half was ajar to ventilate the interior; through this, Crockett must enter. The lower portion was fastened, upon the inside, as he soon ascertained.

Peering cautiously over the door, he heard a faint snort, then the heavy stamping of a horse's hoofs upon the hard-beaten earth floor. Immediately following came a rustle of dried grass, then the click that tells of a rifle or pistol being prepared for use.

Instinctively Davy shrunk back, knowing that his head could be distinctly outlined against the clear moonlight. For a moment he was completely nonplused.

"Who's thar? Speak, or I'll plug ye!" came a deep, determined voice from within.

"A friend," mechanically returned Crockett.

"Darn sech fri'nds! Take 'im, Tiger!"

A lithe form shot from the stable through the open space, and into the moonlight. Quickly turning, it crouched low down, glaring upon the hunter.

Partially in the shadow, Crockett knelt close to the log-wall, feeling himself in a pretty trap; but as he saw the deadly purpose of the huge dog, he flashed forth his stout knife.

Not a moment too soon was this action. Scarce pausing to collect its energies, the beast uttered a low, fierce snarl, then launched its gaunt body through the air, full at the throat of the hunter.

As, more than once during his eventful career, Crockett had received the deadly leap of a panther, he now met this onset. Firm as a bar of iron the outstretched arm held the knife, against whose point the maddened brute hurled itself.

Full against its broad breast the keen point struck sinking to the very hilt through flesh and bone. The shock

crushed Crockett to the ground, the dog falling upon him. But it was beyond doing harm; the force of its own leap had wrought its death.

Whirling from beneath its writhing carcass, Crockett clutched its throat with the grip of a giant, then hurled the body several yards away. Slipping, he fell to the ground, just as a broad glare of light poured over the top of the half-door.

Beyond a doubt to this mishap Davy Crockett owed his life. Instead of the bullet crashing through his brain, it merely knocked the hat from his head, in its passage cutting a lock of hair.

Mingled with this report came several shrill shrieks from the house standing but a short distance away. Even then Crockett knew that these were the voices of women, but he naturally supposed them called forth by the shot that had so well-nigh cut short his career.

With a hoarse cry of alarm, the man who had been defending his loved horse, leaped over the half-door, paying no farther attention to Crockett, but rushing madly toward the spot from whence still came the shrieks.

Though not a little confused, Crockett did not forget the task that had been set him, and clambering over the barrier, he entered the stable. Once again he narrowly escaped destruction.

A shrill scream filled the air, and he staggered back, a tingling in one ear, his left arm partially benumbed. The stallion, recognizing a stranger, had viciously plunged out his hoofs, one hoof brushing Davy's face, the other glancing from his shoulder.

In the dim light he could now outline the beast, and springing nimbly forward, he seized the horse by the tail, just as its hoofs raised a second time. Merely lifted a few inches from the ground, Davy then gained the head of the excited brute in safety, firmly clutching his nostrils, holding him motionless.

Recognizing a master, the stallion allowed the hunter to untie and lead him to the door. This was quickly opened, and the amateur horse-thief emerged, his task performed.

Curses and oaths met his ears, and turning, he glanced

toward the dwelling. The front door was open, a faint light shone from within. A confused struggle was evidently going on inside.

"What can—"

"No matter to *you* what, Wash. Connel," interrupted a harsh voice a little to one side, as one of the Wolves stepped forward. "If you're wise you'll attend to what the captain gave you, and not run your head against a bullet or a knife. You know he has his doubts now as to what you *really* are."

"What's he up to, then?" muttered Crockett, shivering.

"Come; he set us to watch that you did not shirk the job. Go get the saddle and bridle. They hang by the stall. Make haste!"

Crockett, half-dazed, obeyed. Of his own accord he had walked into the trap that now pinched hard; and he knew the folly of struggling.

As the saddle was secured, the call of the Frontier Wolf rung out, and then the little band of outlaws rode rapidly away from the spot. Davy Crockett bestrode the black stallion he had stolen, and at any other time he would have gone into ecstasies over its superb action; but now other thoughts filled his mind.

At the head of his men rode the tall form of the Frontier Wolf. But in his arms, partially supported by the horse's withers, he held a strangely-shaped bundle. The sight of this was what perturbed Davy Crockett.

Spurring his charger forward, Davy reached the outlaw's side before any divined his purpose; and in that one moment he read the truth.

"Back to your place—back! or I'll leave you food for the coyotes!" thundered the Wolf.

"I on'y meant to show you the boss you wanted was here," quietly replied Crockett, yet with a steely glitter in his eyes.

CHAPTER IV.

ONE AGAINST TEN.

"No one stirring—no smoke from the chimney! What can be the matter?"

These words broke involuntarily from the lips of a young man, as he reined in his snorting mustang upon the crest of the prairie swell. Before him lay the possessions of Barton Richmond, looking lone and deserted in the red rays of the rising sun.

Fearing, he scarcely knew what, Cyrus Norton gave his wiry mustang free head and dashed up to the door-yard, ungreeted by either man or beast. All was still—a strange, unnatural silence at that time of day.

Springing to the ground, his bronzed face wearing a look of dread, Norton advanced to the entrance of the house, calling aloud the name of the settler. Still no answer.

"My God!" gasped the young man, staggering back horror-stricken by the sight that met his gaze.

Two human forms lay at length upon the floor. Both were gray-haired; it needed but the one glance to tell Cyrus who they were.

Furniture was scattered around in disorder as though cast here and there during a furious struggle. Blood stained the floor. Near the door, having run from the body of the man, was a pool of coagulated blood.

Then, with an eager cry, Norton sprung over the threshold. He had caught the glitter of Richmond's eye, and knew that he was not dead—only bound, hand and foot.

"What does all this mean, Richmond?" excitedly cried the young man, as the stout bonds fell before his nimble knife. "Where's—where's Amy?"

His swollen jaws working in the vain attempt to speak, as the gag fell from them, Richmond nodded toward his companion in misery, as he rose to a sitting posture. But as Norton bent over the motionless body of the gray-haired wo-

man, he started back with a faint cry, his face distorted with horror.

Richmond crawled forward, with wildly beating heart. One look into the staring, glazed eyeballs told him the truth. The blackened, swollen features, the distended veins, all spoke of suffocation.

Lying within arm's-length of her husband, the poor woman had died an agonizing death, unable to lift a limb, unable to give the feeblest sign to show him her peril. Realizing this, the strong settler uttered a low, heart-rending cry, and sunk upon the corpse of her he had loved so long and well, senseless.

"Amy — Amy, darling!" cried Norton, glancing around with a frightened air, as though fearful that a still more horrible vision should meet his eyes. "Amy—where are you? 'Tis a friend calls—your Cyrus!"

Only the echoes of his own voice made reply. And then, half wild, Norton rushed into the other rooms, searching the ranche thoroughly, though hastily. But she whom he sought was not to be found.

Convinced of this, Cyrus returned and set about restoring Richmond, as the shortest means of getting at the truth of the affair. But it was many minutes before his exertions were rewarded by returning consciousness, and even then the stricken settler appeared dazed and bewildered. This last blow had nearly killed him.

But by dint of persistent questioning, Cyrus Norton gained a fair idea of the facts.

That night Richmond had watched his horse, as the outlaws had been unusually busy for several nights past. At the cries of his wife and daughter, he forgot all else and rushed to their defense. He found them struggling in the grasp of strangers. All unarmed as he was, he freed them for a moment, his sledge-hammer blows scattering the outlaws right and left. But then a knife sunk deep in his side—a pistol-butt felled him senseless on the floor.

When consciousness returned, he was lying bound hand and foot, gagged beyond the possibility of speaking—almost of breathing.

"They've stolen Amy away. We must work, or she's

lost! Come! every moment is an age that she remains in the power of these devils. Up!—be a man!

"I can't leave Molly; she'll be skeered to wake up an' find us all gone. She ain't strong, you know, Cy, since poor Harry was killed," muttered Richmond, staring vacantly at the face of his murdered wife.

"Man—man—rouse yourself! Don't you see that she is beyond your help? She's dead; those devils have murdered her, and they'll kill Amy, unless we work like men. Up, man! Think of *retenge*!"

"Dead—murdered, Cy?" slowly uttered Richmond, rising erect, one hand pressing his wrinkled brow. "You're a good boy. You won't lie to the old man? Tell me then, honest, is she dead?"

"Look, father—you can see that," muttered Norton, chokingly.

"Who did it?" added the strange, low voice.

"I don't know for sure—but the same ones carried away Amy, perhaps for worse than death. When we find *her*, we'll find the murderers."

"An' we will find 'em! I swear it here—over poor dead Molly. You hear me, Cy?"

"And join with you, too. But now to work. Do you secure the house, then go and rouse the neighbors. Send Cornell with the word—his wife 'll dress your hurt. I'll take the trail, and leave sign for you to follow. In that way no time will be lost. Go now—the living call for your aid first; then the dead. You understand?"

"Yes—I'll do it. Don't fear for me, lad. I ain't the kind to give way when thar's work to be did. Go on—do the best ye know, an' may God aid you!"

Catching up a red flannel shirt, Norton left the ranche, and whistling to his horse, ran rapidly along the trail left by the murderers. This was broad and plain. The numerous hoofs had cut deep into the prairie turf, and the young hunter had no difficulty in following it. At intervals he thrust a twig into the ground, its split top holding a bit of the bright flannel. He knew that ere many hours, the springy turf would almost totally obliterate the trail. But by these signs, those in pursuit could easily guide their steps.

His mind was racked with conflicting suspicions. One of two men he felt assured was the leader in this outrage; but which one of those two?

He had heard the floating rumor that "Black Will"—as young Cloud was generally termed—was more or less intimately connected with the outlaw known as the Frontier Wolf. Of its truth, he could only surmise.

In the days gone by, young Cloud had been a suitor for the hand of fair Amy Richmond, as indeed was the case with half a score others. But all had gradually withdrawn from the race, seeing that success lay between Norton and Cloud. The latter proposed and was rejected. He rode off, vowing revenge—that Amy should be humbled to the very dust. That same night Norton dared his fate, and learned that his love was returned. Amy told him of Cloud's threats, having first bound him to secrecy.

Two days before this black morning, Cloud had called and repeated his offer. Being refused again, his rage broke forth. In answer Amy referred him to Norton, proudly avowing their betrothal. Wild with rage, Cloud rode away. That night his sister Hattie disappeared; the following night Amy Richmond was abducted and her mother murdered; though this last deed was probably unintentional.

Owing to these threats, Norton suspected Cloud. But the dozen men who had been concerned in the outrage? If he was really connected with the outlaws, that was answered. If not—then the deed could only rest at the door of the Frontier Wolf.

However that might be, Cyrus knew that there was danger in the work before him, and he did not forget the caution taught by a life spent in border peril and warfare. Though young—several years on the sunny side of thirty—he had seen considerable service, both against the Indians and Mexican foragers from beyond the line.

Until nearly noon he followed the trail, his well-trained mustang keeping close to his heels, lazily cropping now and then, a mouthful of grass. Norton was puzzled as he noted the direction taken. With others he believed that the outlaw known as the Frontier Wolf had his rendezvous somewhere in the dense chaparral. But this trail was leading

in a direction almost at right angles with the course that should be pursued in order to gain the timber—leading directly toward the heart of the almost unbounded prairies.

Suddenly, as he raised his eyes to survey the ground stretching before him, Norton uttered a cry of chagrin. The nature of the ground seemed abruptly to change. Instead of the rich grayish-green sward, the prairie seemed covered with a dingy mantle of snow, that stretched for miles upon either hand.

A few rods farther, and the trail became invisible. The ground was thickly strewn with a chalky shale, upon which an unshod hoof made no impress. Not a blade of grass could grow here; naught save here and there a stunted patch of sage, that, at a few yards' distance, could not be distinguished from the whitish ground.

With an anxious face, Cyrus searched for something to show him which way the abductors had gone, but in vain. The snare baffled all his keenness.

Before long he gained the edge of the barranca before alluded to. And as he gazed blankly at the opposite side, his mind suddenly cleared.

"Bah! fool that I was, not to have used it before! This runs for miles on either hand, with but two crossings. They came here to delay pursuit, or thinking to throw us off the scent entirely. But I'll match them yet! The trail will cross the lower bridge—the one leading to the chaparral."

Cyrus Norton sprang lightly into the saddle, and bending low down, uttered a peculiar cry. The fiery mustang sprang forward like an arrow from the bow, casting the snowy dust in clouds to the breeze.

For two miles the chalky deposit covered the ground, then ended as abruptly as it had begun. Here Norton leaped from the saddle, and bent low down, quivering the ground like a hound seeking to recover scent.

But his air of triumph gradually faded, an anxious expression taking its place, as minute after minute passed by, without his finding the anticipated sign. Foot by foot—almost inch by inch—he searched the ground for a hundred yards, until fully assured that the abductors had not passed that spot. Reluctantly he was forced to acknowledge this.

"Fooled again! They've passed by the upper bridge. But why—can it be that they are strangers here—that the Wolf had nothing to do with this? Ha! Will Cloud left recently, vowing revenge—he is the miscreant!"

Once more mounting, Cyrus Norton dashed over the chalky shale, never drawing rein during the full half-score miles over which the deposit extended. Then a glad cry broke from his lips, as he distinguished the lost trail, now found.

Again he marked the way with the crimson bits of flannel, from time to time, until the upper "bridge" was gained. This was something similar to the one already described, though more precipitous and difficult to cross, owing to the loose rocks and boulders.

To the edge Cyrus tracked the abductors; but upon the further side he could not pick up the trail. Never before had he been so often baffled during one day's work.

As a last resource he set forward at a gallop toward a small *arroyo* or creek that he knew of, which ran across the prairie nearly parallel with the barranca. Upon the soft ground bordering the stream, he hoped to recover the spoor.

It was now past noon. The sun shone hot and sultry. Tired and jaded by his rapid work, his throat parched by the clouds of chalk-dust cast up by his mustang's hoofs, Norton lay down and drank heartily of the clear, cold water.

His horse raised his head, then snorted loudly. Glancing up, Norton saw its nose extended, its ears laid back, its teeth exposed. More than once before he had seen similar actions; and each time they heralded the approach of danger to himself.

Quickly he followed with his glance the direction indicated by the mustang. Just emerging from behind a clump of timber that stood only a mile from the bridge, was a small body of horsemen, riding rapidly, in such a direction that his retreat across the barranca was cut off.

The young trail-hunter reasoned close and quickly. He saw that the horsemen were white. But he knew that they had not crossed the barranca since he had, else he must have observed them sooner. Therefore, they could not be the neighbors roused by Richmond. The country was not thickly settled enough for such a group of travelers to be a common

sight. There was no celebration—no meeting—no barbecue or other festivity to come off on that day; and nothing else could account for so many of the honest settlers riding in one direction.

Hence Norton reasoned that they were some of the Wolf's band; probably some of those who had descended upon Richmond's ranche. And to fall into their hands would be the reverse of agreeable, since they must know from his actions that he had been trailing them.

"Come, old boy," he muttered, vaulting into the saddle, show these gentry your heels. 'Tis scarce ten miles to Brunson's—there we'll be safe."

With a joyous whicker the petted mustang crossed the stream with a bird-like grace, then stretched out in a steady, tireless run, as though he had not already covered nearly two-score miles since the break of day.

A faint shout reached Norton's ear, and, glancing over his shoulder, a smile curled his lip as he saw the horsemen dash forward in hot chase. He felt implicit confidence in the animal he bestrode, and had no doubt as to his gaining Brunson's ranche in safety, where the sturdy settler and his four sons would laugh to scorn any efforts of the pursuers.

At his second backward glance, a frown darkened Norton's face. Forging ahead of his comrades, was one man, mounted upon a large black horse, that he could not mistake.

"It's Richmond's Morgan. Well, he may catch up with me, but there's only one man on its back. And then the stallion is mine."

For two miles Norton held his own, even with the big black, but then an unlooked-for accident proved fatal to his hopes. The mustang, by some chance, turned his left fore-foot, and as it gave way, fell heavily to the ground, casting Norton far over his head.

Norton rode in the true border style—with long leathers, so that he might be almost said to be standing erect in the huge wooden stirrups. Thus, when the accident occurred, he was shot from the saddle, alighting feet first, then falling forward, but in such a manner that a few slight bruises only followed his mishap.

A far-away exultant yell rung in his ears as he sprung erect,

clutching his rifle. Glancing back, Norton saw his pursuers pressing forward with renewed speed, the one bestriding the black stallion several lengths ahead.

The same glance showed the young man his horse lying upon the ground without motion, its head doubled beneath its body. Its neck was broken.

"It's fight, then," muttered Norton, casting a swift glance around him.

The prairie was nearly level, utterly devoid of cover. It seemed rank folly for him to even dream of resistance. One rush would overpower him.

Yet Norton looked to his rifle and pistols, casting himself flat behind the body of his horse. Then the dark tube pointed toward the horsemen; with pistols lying cocked beside him, Cyrus awaited the result.

The rider of the black stallion motioned to his followers, and they also cocked their pieces, though still advancing. Norton smiled grimly. Evidently they did not like his stern front.

"Hollo, there!" cried out the leader, when within rifle range, reining in his horse.

"Hollo, yourself," retorted Norton, glancing along his rifle-barrel.

"No impudence. Who are you?"

"The very question I was about to ask *you*, though if that horse you ride could speak, I can guess what he would say," coolly returned Cyrus.

"I know you now! You are Cy Norton.

"Yes—and you are the Frontier Wolf."

"I'm not ashamed to acknowledge it. What made you run?"

"What made you follow?"

"Human nature. Whatever runs is sure to be chased," laughed the outlaw. "But come—I wish to talk with you."

"I thought you were doing that already. But go on, I'll listen to you; but keep your distance. I can hear what you have to say from there. A closer interview might be unhealthy."

"Fool! do you tempt your fate? If I say the word, these

men will ride over you without hesitation. I don't mean you any harm, but for certain reasons I am desirous that you accompany me home. Surrender, and I pledge you safety."

"Words are cheap. I know you, Wolf. If you want me, you must come and take me. But make your will first. It'll not be the first time that I have hit the bigness of a man."

The Frontier Wolf made no reply to this, but turned his horse and rode back to his men. They appeared earnestly consulting for the next few minutes.

Norton drew a long and steady bead upon the leader, but did not touch the trigger. The distance was too great for a certain shot, and he knew well that when the fray once began time would not be given him to reload his weapon.

His actions may seem foolhardy in the extreme when there were ten men confronting him, all well mounted and armed. Yet he firmly believed that even were he to surrender without striking a blow, the Wolf would put him to death, knowing, as he must, the connection between him and the abducted maiden. For this reason he resolved to sell his life as dearly as possible.

A loud cry announced the conclusion of the outlaws' deliberations. Then the party separated, riding out and around so as to surround the young man.

Norton smiled grimly at this, and drawing his knife, thrust its point into the body of the horse, where it was convenient to his grasp. Then his eyes followed the motions of the Wolf. For him he reserved the bullet in his rifle.

The surround completed, a cry from the leader gave the signal to charge. Each man put spurs to his horse and dashed forward in silence save for the thundering of hoofs upon the springy turf.

The riders lay low in the saddles, with tight-drawn rein holding the head of their horses high in the air, thus affording them a tolerably complete shield, as they advanced direct upon the young man.

But a sure hand held and a keen eye directed the weapons. Only a shoulder and one leg of the Frontier Wolf were ex-

posed to view, and at the former Norton fired, trusting that the bullet would pass on into his body.

At the report, an angry cry broke from the Wolf's lips, and reeling, he fell from the saddle, the black stallion almost instantly stopping. Then Norton sprung to his feet, either hand holding a pistol.

Cool and calm, he took aim, though it seemed as though ere he could fire the thundering hoofs must crush him to the earth, a shapeless, mangled mass. But such was not the Frontier Wolf's intentions.

Though wounded, he struggled to his feet, holding fast to the long, flowing mane of the stallion, and uttered a loud cry. As if by magic, each horse was jerked to its haunches, and the Wolves leaped to the ground.

At that moment Norton fired, once, twice. One outlaw sunk to the ground without a groan, a discolored spot marking the center of his forehead. Another rolled over the prairie sward in agony, yelling madly as he clasped his hands to where the bullet had tore its way across his face, forever blinding him.

Dropping his pistols, Cyrus stooped for his knife. Then the surviving outlaws were upon him.

Dashing aside the man whose brawny hand clutched at his throat, Norton dealt one blow. The heavy blade sunk hilt deep in the outlaw's breast.

With a hoarse yell he staggered back, wrenching the weapon from the young man's hand. Then plucking the blade from its living sheath, he raised it over the now unarmed youth, but the hand of death was upon him. A gush of blood stained his shaggy beard, and he sunk to the ground; one convulsive shudder, and his spirit fled from his crime-stained casket.

With a blow from a pistol-butt, Cyrus Norton was felled across the body of his horse, and ere he recovered his senses, he was bound hand and foot.

The first object his opening eyes rested upon, was the tall figure of the Frontier Wolf, his shoulder laid bare, an outlaw dressing the ragged wound. The rifle-ball had passed through without touching a bone.

"Curse the hand that failed me for the first time!" gritted

Norton, meeting the cold smile of the Wolf with an angry glare. "I Loped I'd ended *your* career."

"Well for you, my lad, that you did not. My men would have cut you into incl. bits, but that they'd avenged me."

"Let's do it now," growled a shaggy-bearded ruffian. "See what the imp's done! Bogan, Hallet an' Dandy Pete rubbed out! Either o' thar little fingers was worth more'n his hull karkidge!"

"Easy, Matson—your turn will come. I've not forgot our law—*blood for blood!* But first I've got a bit of business with him. After that you may have your way," coldly returned the Wolf.

"Bah! I'll live to send you to your master, yet," defiantly cried Cyrus, the ardor of battle not yet cooled in his veins.

"No back talk. Matson, bring up one of the spare horses for this hot-blood. It's time we were making for camp."

Norton was lifted into the saddle, and there tied securely. Then one of the outlaws took his halter and led the captive forward.

Leaving two men with instructions how to dispose of their dead, the Frontier Wolf rode forward in the direction of the chaparral.

CHAPTER V.

CROCKETT AT WORK.

THE encampment of the Prairie Wolves was buried in indolent quietude. It was the hour directly after their mid-day meal. With the exception of the regularly appointed look-outs, all seemed sleeping or idly dreaming away the time.

Davy Crockett reclined in the shadow of a stunted tree, leisurely pulling at his pipe. But though his eyes were closed, his mind was busy:

The conduct he had shown in securing the *Richmond* had served to weaken if not entirely break my doubts

the Frontier Wolf had entertained as to the truth of his story, and our friend was now at liberty to go where he willed. But Davy gave no thought toward escaping from his lawless companions, at least alone.

Since gaining the chaparral after their raid—which they accomplished by descending into the barranca at the upper bridge, traversing its rocky bottom until emerging at the lower crossing, thus effectually breaking their trail—the Bear-Hunter had learned two things. One was that Amy Richmond was held an unwilling captive; the other, that Hattie Cloud was not with this portion of the outlaw's band. He had managed to closely scrutinize every woman in the glade; but the maiden for whose welfare he had turned outlaw and horse-thief was not visible.

"Thar is another nest," mused Davy; "the varmint let slip that, though he didn't mean it. Hattie must be thar. But this other—what o' her? A pesky mixed-up job! Wish't I was clear of it, too!"

From under his hat-brim—for which he had exchanged the coon-skin cap—the hunter glanced keenly around, his gaze resting longest upon a particular hut. Beside this lay doubled up one of the outlaws. This was the guard, now overcome by sleep, well knowing that Amy could not escape unobserved.

Acting upon a sudden impulse, Davy Crockett arose and glided toward the hut. No one appeared to heed his motions, and stooping, he entered the low doorway.

Amy Richmond was half reclining upon a bed of leaves and small twigs. At his entrance she started to a sitting position, though shrinking back in alarm.

She was a fair flower to be found growing on the far border. And as he gazed keenly upon her, Crockett felt the blood tingling in his veins. Like all true, big-hearted men, he was an admirer of womanly grace and beauty.

Amy was scarcely of the medial height, but her form was well developed by plenty of out-door exercise, rounded, plump and graceful. Her hair, now flowing disheveled over her shoulders, was of a deep, rich brown; her eyes large, lustrous, hazel; her complexion clear and bright; her lips full, crimson, her chin dimpled. If not that of a Ma-

don't, the face was that of a true woman, one to love and be loved in return.

"Don't be skeered, lady," hastily whispered Crockett. "I'm one who'll befriend you if I can. I only pertended to join this gang beca'se I thought they'd carried off the da'ter of a friend o' mine—Dan'l Cloud. She ain't here, but I won't leave while you're in trouble. Keep awake to-night, and I'll try and set you free."

"You're not—not deceiving me?" murmured Amy, imploringly.

"No—if I desert you willingly, may the good Lord desert me when I need his help. But be keerful—for I don't know when he'll be back. When he comes, you kin ax him yourself. I know my place better'n to stick my nose in the cap'n's a'fa'rs."

Amy was not a little surprised at the sudden change both in tone and sentiment, but a meaning look from Crockett put her upon guard. In fact, through an opening in the rude wall, Davy had caught sight of a man gliding nearer, and recognized him as the one who had greeted him by his right name.

"What's up?" demanded this worthy, only half satisfied with the words he had heard.

"She called me to ax the cap'n here," coolly added Crockett, turning and leaving the hut.

Davy returned to his mossy couch and pipe. His brain was busy shaping the details of a plan by which he could free Amy from the Wolf's clutches. That it would be a task attended by no small degree of danger he well knew, but that did not shake his resolve. In a measure he had been concerned in the capture, though unwittingly, and he felt bound in honor to make reparation.

A half-hour later the Frontier Wolf returned from his ride, bringing in Cyrus Norton a prisoner. The absence of five men, with the presence of two led horses, plainly told the Wolves that a tragedy had occurred, and the camp was instantly on the alert.

First calling for liquor, the Wolf drank long and deep, then motioned his men around, after the horses had been secured. Crockett drew near to where Norton lay on the ground, helplessly bound.

"Well, my men," began the outlaw, "you see we have another prize—but it is one that cost us dear. He proved himself a man—that I must admit, though my shoulder smarts at the thought of our three brave comrades cut off in their sphere of usefulness by his hand. Silence! Hear me to an end," he cried, as an angry murmur arose around the crowd and more than one weapon flashed in the dim light.

"I have not forgotten our law, men—*blood for blood*. It has never yet been broken; it shall be kept to the very letter still. But I mean to give the culprit a little longer grace than is customary. You deserve an explanation, and that I willingly give you.

"Last night we invited a lady to visit our retreat: Miss Amy Richmond. I tell you frankly that I have chosen her to be my wife—our queen. Unluckily for him, this young man has also cast his eyes in that direction. This is, I suppose, the reason he attacked us.

"To-night I ride to bring in the old priest you know of—the one that lives like a hermit beside the Trinity. At sunrise to-morrow he will wed us. At the same hour you can **avenge your comrades.**"

A wild cheer greeted these words. Norton strove to speak, but the outlaw chief ordered him conveyed to the prison-hut. Crockett and two others seized upon the helpless man, and **carried him away.**

Our hero busied himself in testing the captive's bonds, as the others moved toward the door. Then he whispered, **cautiously:**

"Don't sleep to-night. Keep your head close to this side o' the hut. Listen for the chirp o' a cricket. I'm a friend; here to set your gal free. Hope on."

With difficulty Cyrus repressed a joyous cry at this evidence that help was near. But then, fearing his indiscretion, Crockett hastily left him. Securing the slab-door, the outlaws left, feeling the uselessness of guarding one so firmly bound as was the captive.

The outlaw chief soon sought the hut within which Amy Richmond was confined—for now the guard deemed it prudent to appear very vigilant. A word dispatched that worthy to join his comrades.

Amy shrunk back in momentary terror, as she recognized the man who had so ruthlessly stolen her from home. Nor were the words of the Wolf calculated to lessen her alarm.

"Miss Richmond, doubtless I owe you an explanation, and I will give you one now. Please pay attention to my words, for I hate repetition. Had I more time, I might use softer terms, but to-morrow we must move to a new hiding-place. You are to accompany us—but before that time you will be my wife."

Amy shrunk back, too greatly alarmed to make reply. The Wolf smiled, then continued:

"I mean what I say. Within an hour I go to bring here a priest, who will unite us. At sunrise you will be my wife. You see I am generous. I take a great deal of trouble that your natural scruples may be stilled. You are wholly in my power—I might dispense with all forms, but I claim to be a gentleman, and as such shall act toward you.

"You may have some curiosity to know who and what I am. Listen then. My name is Pierre Dubois, or was, while in my native state, North Carolina. Here I am known far and wide as the FRONTIER WOLF. This is a title that, not many years since, was familiar to the entire South. Along the Roanoke river a strange race of people had existence. For the most part they were the children of thieves, adventurers and runaways. My grandfather, a French exile, wedded the belle of this race. My father abandoned them, and became a respected planter. I am his only son. The wild blood runs in my veins still, and oftener than at home, I ranged the swamps with the few who were left of the tribe—the last of the 'Frontier Wolves,' as they were known. In a wild adventure I shed blood. I fled across the line into Texas. My father has sent me the Governor's pardon. I can return at any moment, a free man. But I had met with you—had learned to love you with all the fire of my soul. You know what my reputation is in this section. That is why I did not urge my suit in a more orthodox manner. I knew that my past life would turn me against you. I tried to forget you, but it was like tearing the very heart from my bosom. I could not. I saw you, sleeping or awake; you were ever present before my eyes, day and night. And that vision has

kept my hands free from blood. Since I met you, I have committed no crime—until last night; and to that desperate act I was driven by the fervor of my love, and the knowledge that in no other way could it be rewarded.”

Weak and trembling, his voice husky, the Frontier Wolf paused, leaning against the wall for support. In mute amazement Amy gazed upon him; she could scarce realize his meaning.

“There—I am a fool,” muttered Dubois, rousing himself, and speaking in a quick, hard tone; “but I will be myself once more. Listen, now, and mark well my words. I am a rich man. You can make me an honest and respected member of society, if you will. I pledge my whole life to making you peaceful and happy. Consent to my plans—promise to become my wife, and I will restore you to your parents.”

“I can not—you ask what is impossible,” faltered Amy, seeing that he waited for an answer.

“Beware! think twice before you cross me! Do you realize your situation? That you are here wholly and entirely at my mercy? These men and women are my slaves—my word is law. Not a hand would be raised to help you—rather they would assist me in case of need. I offer you an honorable marriage. Do not force me to degrade both you and myself. You will, if you prove obstinate. Mine you must and shall be. I swear it by the powers of Heaven and hell!”

“But this is idle,” he continued, in a more calm tone. “I was foolish to become angered. I have told you my will. Think over the matter. I give you until day-dawn for reflection. At that time I will come here with a priest. You can not leave this hut save as my wife.”

“I will throw myself upon his mercy—he will not act against my consent,” wildly cried Amy, in the terror of the moment forgetting the stranger’s pledge.

“A man will do much when his life is at stake,” laughed Dubois; then turning, he left the hut, reissuing his orders to the sentinel.

Amy sink back upon the leafy couch, and, woman-like, relieved her feelings by a flood of tears. Happily she was yet unknown to her father, but her lover was also a prisoner, else her last

hope would have vanished. As it was, she believed that he would arrive in time to rescue her. Blessed confidence of true love!

The Frontier Wolf, after having his wound dressed more thoroughly, ate a hearty supper, then sounded to saddle, and, with a half-score picked men, he rode forth from the chaparral retreat.

Davy Crockett had slept near enough to the hut to overhear the outlaw's threats, and now knew that he had no time to lose, if he meant to keep his pledge. That night, if at all, he must set free the lovers.

The necessity for speedy action quickened Crockett's wits, and, before many more minutes passed by, a plan that, though daring, yet offered a fair hope of success, was already mapped out in his mind. And he lost no time in preparing for its execution.

The hut where Norton was confined was guarded by the outlaw who had first suspected Crockett of being a spy—Ben Rose, by name. Davy's brow knit as he made this discovery.

From the hut that contained the spare weapons of the band, Davy managed to secure a brace of serviceable pistols, with their ammunition, and a stout-bladed knife. These articles he concealed upon his person, then glided silently to the rear of the prison-hut.

Crouching in the deep shade, he cautiously imitated the chirp of a wood cricket. Almost instantly the signal was repeated from within. Norton was awake and expectant.

"Be patient—I'll set ye free," whispered Crockett, his lips placed close to the frail wall.

One effort of his full strength would have made a breach in the wall, had such been his intentions. But the dry twigs and crackling bark would have instantly aroused the guard.

While one hand, aided by the broad-bladed knife, tore up the soft mold, the other cautiously scraped it away. Pausing from time to time, to assure himself that Rose suspected nothing, Davy worked on for nearly an hour. At the end of that time he had enlarged the hole sufficiently for his purpose.

First gliding around until he could make out the dark figure of Rose seated upon the ground, drowsily smoking a pipe,

Crockett turned and entered the hut, through the hole beneath the wall. As his knife quickly severed the bonds that confined Norton, the scout muttered :

"Now mind what I tell ye. When you git out o' this, make a straight shoot for your friends and git them to jine you. Come back to the barranca, opposite this place, unless you see me and the gal afore. Don't come no nearer, for these devils kin hold the timber against more 'n you can fetch to match 'em. In the open, it 'll be different. D'y' mind ?"

"Yes—but I hate to desert her—the lady," hesitated Norton.

"Nat'ral enough, but you can't do any good by stayin'. If one man can do it, I'll have her free afore day. If not, then you must try your hand. Now rub your legs good. 'Tain't likely, but you *may* be seen or heard by some o' the varmints, and then you'll need your best legs. I'd git you a horse, but that can't be did 'ithout the guard's hearing it."

"Lend me your knife ; if they *do* discover me, I'd like to make my mark."

"Here's better," and Crockett handed him the confiscated weapons. "Now hold yourself ready to make a break when you hear the uproar. I'm going to make a bonfire for the boys. In the confusion, even if they see you, you won't be noticed. Don't stir before, as you hope to meet the gal safe and free once more."

"I'll mind ; but hasten. Think what she must suffer—every moment is an age !"

Davy crawled through the narrow aperture, and glided away in the underbrush. The next minute he was kneeling close behind the hut that held the fire-arms and horse-furniture of the outlaws.

For this part of the task he was already prepared. A bunch of rags and dried moss was soaked with whisky, then covered with a pile of leaves. The thoroughly seasoned brush and twisted grass that composed the shanty was as inflammable as tinder.

Hidden behind the leaves was a small coal of fire ; this Crockett placed in the tinder, then blew upon it gently. A bright blaze instantly shot up, over which he cast the

leaves and grass, then hastily glided into the underbrush.

Scarcely had he disappeared, when the flame burst out, and with startling rapidity sprung up to the very roof of the frail structure, wrapping it in a sheet of fire. The alarm was quickly given by the guard on duty over Amy Richmond's prison-house, and in an instant the entire camp was aroused.

This was the moment chosen for Cyrus Norton to break from his prison, but his escape was destined not to be so easy. Aroused from a doze by the uproar, startled by the broad glare of light that shone in his face, Ben Rose instinctively darted around the hut, heading for the nearest cover, doubtless fancying the camp had been surprised by enemies.

As he turned the corner a dark form seemingly sprung up from the bowels of the earth, directly before him. In the collision that neither could prevent, both forms went to the ground, where they grappled with instinctive fury, Rose raising his voice to give the alarm:

"Help! the pris'ner is 'scaping! the—"

His speech terminated in a shrill yell of agony, as a dart of fire seemed to pierce his very heart. With a strong, sure hand Norton had driven his knife-blade home.

Springing to his feet, he glanced wildly around. He saw that the alarm had been given.

The entire glade was lighted up by the furiously blazing hut. Arrested by the shrill cry of their comrade, several of the outlaws turned in time to behold the dark form rise, clasp-
ing a bloody knife in one hand. And in that one glance they recognized the form and features of their prisoner.

With mad yells they darted forward, their pistols speaking rapidly, but, as if unharmed by the volley, Cyrus Norton dashed into the sheltering underbrush, the next moment entering the beaten trail that led to the prairie beyond.

A dozen of the Wolves pressed on in hot pursuit. The others, all save the one guarding Amy Richmond, more thoughtfully listened to where the horses were secured.

Among these was Davy Crockett, whose voice had been loudest among those calling to pursue—whose pistols had spoken among the first discharged.

But his bullets only pierced the tree-tops. Norton was in little danger from them.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HERMIT PIQUEST.

PIERRE DEBOIS rode out from the chaparral, leading the way over the slightly undulating prairie at a speed that betokened his desire to accomplish his mission without delay.

Behind him rode half a score men, well armed and mounted, for the most part truly villainous-looking scoundrels, but for all that they were faithful—to their leader, at least.

For an hour the little band pressed on at a gallop—the true western style of riding—in speechless silence. The sun had sunk to rest behind the grass-crested hills, and the sky was already glittering with stars, while the full moon had just risen above the prairie horizon.

The Frontier Wolf abruptly reined in his horse, throwing himself from the saddle, bending an ear close to the ground. And now that their own horses' hoofs were idle, the outlaws could distinguish the suspicious sounds that had caught the keen ear of the Wolf even while in full gallop.

From beyond the swell in the prairie before them, there came the rapid thud of horses' hoofs, and the regular, measured beat forbade the idea of its being made by a drove of wild mustangs. The horses were bestrode by men—but friend or foe? Indians or pale-faces?"

The Kioways were professedly at peace with the whites, but upon that, little dependence could be placed. They were ever treacherous. And then the Comanches sometimes—though only at long intervals—found their way this far to the south-east. Though the "Indian moon" was still

some months away, this might be an independent war-party out on the maraud.

For the Indians, Dubois cared little, since he was at peace with them—indeed, upon more than one occasion they had acted as allies. What he dreaded was to see the forms of white men rise above the dividing swell.

A party of these could only be riding, at that hour, with one purpose in view—searching for him. The past day had been long enough to gather a force even from the widely scattered settlers, and that his hand in the abduction of Amy Richmond was at least suspected, the actions of Cyrus Norton plainly evidenced.

“Cautiously—follow me to the timber yonder,” lastly muttered the Frontier Wolf, leaping once more into the saddle. “Under cover we may be able to fight them—but not in the open.”

“Mebbe they’re reds,” suggested one.

“Perhaps—but only a fool would risk his life on such a chance.”

At a few hundred yards’ distance stood a small clump of timber—an island, in prairie parlance. Toward this the outlaws were now proceeding as noiselessly as possible.

A quick, shrill yell from behind told that they were discovered, ere half the distance was covered. Dubois turned his head and drew rein, for right well he knew that such a cry could only issue from the lips of an Indian—or a wild beast.

“Tis all right, boys,” he muttered. “That is the Kioway yell. I’ll answer it.”

Clear and distinct his voice rose upon the night air, in exact imitation of the coyote—a querulous, yelping snarl. Then he listened, a little anxiously.

Over the swell could be seen a number of human heads and shoulders, with feathered crests, and tall spear-points. The horses were hidden by the rise of the ground.

In answer to the Wolf’s cry, came another; deep, sonorous and rumbling—a volume of sound that seemed impossible to have issued from a human chest; the angry bellowing of a buffalo-bull.

“Good!” cried Dubois, his black eyes gleaming, “it’s Mad Buffalo—no fighting this time, boys.”

"Lucky fer us, too," muttered one, as the savages advanced into plainer view. "They're four to one!"

The Frontier Wolf rode forward and warmly returned the greeting of the foremost savage: the redoubted Mad Buffalo himself. Just now this *cobriquet* seemed little merited.

The chief was small of stature—almost diminutive beside the tall Wolf—who towered above him head and shoulders. His form was slight but wiry; his features wrinkled and mean; but fully a dozen scars upon the bronze-like skin bore evidence that he had by no means passed his "days in slothful peace." In the clear moonlight these were visible, since, save his moccasins and plain breech-clout, the chief only wore a light buffalo-robe flung over his back, suspended by a narrow band across his chest.

Dubois conversed with him in the Kiowa dialect, speaking rapidly and with eagerness. The chief replied, with numerous gestures, but evidently to the Wolf's satisfaction. Then the savages rode on, brushing past the outlaws without word or sign of recognition.

Again Dubois led his men on, vouchsafing no explanation of what had passed between himself and Mad Buffalo, and the outlaws knew his temper too well to ask questions. Still they knew that they could trust him.

For another hour, the Wolf dashed on at the long, sweeping, tireless lope that is the natural gait of prairie horses as well as horsemen. This brought them to the edge of a small but rapid stream, the banks of which were fringed with timber. From this point their progress was more leisurely, and Dubois seemed a little uncertain as to his course.

Finally, however, his journey's end was reached. In a more than usually dense clump of trees and undergrowth, a small hut nestled.

On foot the outlaws reached it—having tethered their horses at the outer edge of the thicket. Having carefully reconnoitered the spot, Dubois approached and rapped loudly upon the rude slab door, with the butt of his pistol.

The hut was built of logs, unhewn, the bark still adhering to the worm-eaten surface in patches. The roof was

evidently covered with earth, since rank grass and weeds increased its height by a yard or more. No sign of window or chimney could be seen from the outside. All around and within was dark. The place seemed deserted, save for the human wolves that surrounded it.

"Ho! there—Foster Durand!" shouted Dubois, in a deep, stern tone. "Open thy door—or down it goes, though I have to bring my horse's heels into play."

"Who calls?" at length answered a voice from within, shrill, cracked and dissonant.

"I—the Frontier Wolf—Pierre Dubois. Open, I say."

"I have naught to do with worldly men, nor with worldly matters, now. Go thy way in peace, and leave me to my devotions."

"No cant—the devil a saint, sooner than you, Durand. I've not forgotten how you left the plantation—nor the cause. But come—open! I mean you no harm—but I've work for you, and that work you must do, saint or no saint."

A rattle was heard as of bars being lowered, and then the door creaked upon its hinges as it swung open. All was dark within.

"Wait—since you must enter, I will strike a light. But I pray you, as you are a man, to moderate your voice. I have a poor patient here, whose life hangs by a thread. For that reason I hesitate. He is sleeping now, but were he to be awakened before nature opens his eyes, he must die."

Father Durand, as Dubois had called the hermit, while talking, raked away a bed of ashes and managed to light a torch by the feeble coals. Small as the hut was, this light but partially illumined the interior.

The priest—for such he indeed was—was a short, stout man, rather inclined to corpulency, which rendered his thin, raspy voice the more ridiculous from force of contrast. His face was broad, smooth-shaven, and not unhand-some, though his age could not be less than fifty years. He still wore the long black gown of a Catholic priest, though worn threadbare and patched in many places.

In one corner of the room stood a rude table—or slab placed upon hewn sticks—and a three-legged stool. The chimney was built inside the house, of sticks and clay. At

one end of the room was a low pallet, filled with dried grass and moss, covered with a tattered blanket.

Upon this now lay a human figure, still and motionless as death. Its head was enveloped in blood-stained bandages. Its garments were torn, bloody and disordered.

The sight of this figure seemed to awaken no little curiosity in the Wolf, and seizing the sputtering torch from the hermit's hand, he glided forward and bent over the man. A half-repressed exclamation broke from his lips, and his hand was outstretched as though to awaken the sleeper.

"Don't—you will kill him," muttered Durand, as he seized Dubois' arm. "I tell you he is wounded nigh unto death, and to be awakened now from the sleep my draught has thrown him into, would be fatal."

"I don't wish his death; but you must explain this, old man," sternly added Dubois, turning away. "I know this man—well. How did he come here, and in such dismal plight?"

"He is not one of your men?"

"That matters nothing to you—whether he is or is not one of my band, I feel an interest in him. Speak out now—and don't stop to choose your words. Tell me the *truth*—if I catch you lying, it will be the worse for you."

"You can insult an old man with impunity now, since you are so well backed," retorted the hermit, not without dignity. "Were you *alone*—were we only man to man, I might feel tempted to answer you after your own tone and style."

"There—no offense, Father Durand. I did forget myself. I know you of old—and that you could have saved your office, and some little pain as well, by a lie then, when the old man caught you confessing—but never mind. Again I ask you to tell me about this. I have a deeper interest in the matter than you may think."

"There is little to tell. Two nights ago, as I was searching for simples along the river bank, a short distance below here, I came upon a body lying in the water, though the head was resting upon land. At first I was frightened, for it seemed that murder had been done, since I could see, by the moonlight, that the man's face was covered with blood. Then, however, I examined the body, and found that the heart still

beat, though faintly. I carried him here, and looked to his hurts. Besides the wound upon the head, that had been made by some heavy blow, a rifle-ball had passed through his body. I restored consciousness, but not reason. He raved terribly, but so incoherently, that I could not learn any thing from his words. He has never spoken a coherent sentence since I found him. Only after dark, this night, could I get him to sleep, through a draught of my own making. Still, if he sleeps till day-dawn, I have hopes that he may recover."

"I trust he may. But, though I wish him well, I must carry out my plans. They are of even more importance," muttered the Wolf, half to himself.

"You spoke of business with me—what is it?" asked the Hermit, with some little curiosity.

"You must ride with me. I need a touch of your office."

"What?"

"I want you to marry me to a young lady at day-dawn. Is that sufficiently plain for your addled brain to read?" testily added Dubois.

"It can not be—my first duty is here, with this man. I was sent to his side to bring him back to life. I can not abandon my trust," firmly returned the hermit.

"You must—whether or no. Unless you go peaceably, I'll blind and gag you, tie you behind me and take you thus. I've ridden too far to be balked now."

"Left alone, this poor creature would die!"

"He need not be left alone. Put him in charge of one of my men. Give him his instructions, and he will carry them out to the letter when I add my command. Come—there is no alternative. You must go—and at once."

"Who is the young lady of whom you speak?"

"No matter. In due time you shall know. All there is for you to do is to perform the ceremony."

"It will not be lawful, if—"

"Lawful or not, 'twill be binding. That is my affair, not yours. I would not force you away from him if there was any remedy. But before another night I must be far away from this section. 'Tis grown to hot for me. The hunters

are about seeking for the Wolf—the time is not yet come for them to feel its fangs in earnest. But never mind that. Step outside and select the man you want. Give him his orders, and then prepare for a rapid ride.

The hermit, well knowing how vain would be all expostulations, obeyed, and then gave the Wolf's cub his instructions. Dubois added his commands, and the outlaw quietly obeyed. Then Durand prepared for his disagreeable ride.

Gliding through the thicket, the outlaws were soon mounted, and then Dubois led the way, taking a more direct course than that by which they had gained the hermit's hut. And over the prairie they sped like phantom horsemen, save for the regular, rapid beat of hoofs upon the springy turf.

They had nearly gained the lower bridge over the barranca, when a footman suddenly sprung into view. The Wolf recognized him as one of his men, and thrust back the half-drawn pistol.

"Why do I find you out here, Jackson?" demanded Dubois, in a tone of surprise.

"The devil's bin to pay, cap'n, sence you've bin gone," hurriedly replied the man. "The camp was sot afire, an' in the fuss, young Norton got away. The boys sot a'ter him, but ain't ketched 'im yet."

The Frontier Wolf was almost beside himself with fury.

"How did—how long ago?"

"Not a hour, cap'n. The boys is a'ter 'im, a-hoosback. He tuck a straight shoot for the settlements, I reckon."

In a tone that could scarcely be recognized, the Frontier Wolf gave his men orders to join in the search, promising the lucky one who should recapture the settler a hundred dollars reward. Then, holding fast to the bridle-rein of the hermit's charger, he dashed madly on toward the rendezvous.

And there another blow awaited him.

CHAPTER VII.

DAVY FINDS HIS HANDS FULL.

WHEN Cyrus Norton plunged into the chaparral, leaving the bleeding form of Ben Rose writhing in agony upon the ground, a portion of the alarmed outlaws followed him on foot, while others hastened to where the horses were secured.

Among the latter was our friend, Davy Crockett. The startling words uttered by Rose had surprised him quite as much as any other of the company, and partially deranged his carefully-considered plans.

Still his native wit was not long at a loss, and he made the best of the matter. He knew that he could do nothing more for Norton, and so devoted all his thoughts to Amy Richmond.

By the time he gained the rude corral, Crockett was cool and collected; perhaps the only one of the lot that was, and this he evidenced in his actions.

First he seized upon the black stallion, and led him out of the jam, easily calming its alarm. The nearest saddle and bridle was then adjusted, carefully and thoroughly. By this time the corral was nearly cleared, the Wolves scarcely pausing to adjust bridles, let alone saddles. "Bareback" they rode off in hot haste.

Davy secured the black to a tree, then entered the corral again and hastily examined the stock left. The best of the lot was the horse loaned him by Daniel Cloud. This he saddled and bridled, using even more care than with the other, which was but natural, since he intended this one for the use of Amy Richmond.

This accomplished, Crockett paused and seemed thinking earnestly. The gloom beneath the trees hid an expression of doubt and uneasiness that rested upon his weather-beaten countenance.

"I must risk it - if not to-night, then she's lost. That

varmint 'll be back soon. It's the only way—so here goes!"

As though thrusting aside all doubts, Davy looked to his weapons, and then glided back to the encampment. At the edge of the clearing he paused and peered keenly out upon the scene, still faintly illumined by the glowing hut and the rays of the moon.

The glade seemed deserted. The women, their terror increased by being roused from sleep by the double alarm, had taken to the chaparral, where they were still hidden in fear and trembling.

"He's still at his post," muttered Crockett, as his keen eyes detected the figure of the outlaw crouching before the hut that contained Amy Richmond. "It's no sure thing the pesky imp don't slip a bit o' cold lead under my hide soon's I show myself. Still—I've give' her my word."

Davy stepped quickly out into the moonlight, at the same time raising his hand with a gesture of peace. The sentinel hastily flung forward his rifle, and seemed about to fire, when Davy's voice reached his ear.

"Easy, thar—don't shoot a fri'nd. It's me—Wash. Connel."

The weapon was lowered, though reluctantly. Evidently the outlaw had not the most implicit confidence in the new recruit. Yet he could not well act otherwise.

"They sent me back here," continued Crockett, carelessly advancing, half stifling a yawn, "to help you put out the fire, but that's settled. They'd ketch the varmint easy."

"Keep back—I don't want your help here," muttered the outlaw, half-raising his rifle.

Crockett's action was prompt and decided. Knowing the necessity of being clear of the glade with Amy, before the return of any of the Wolves, he hesitated not a moment.

With one bound he clutched the rifle barrel, at the same time pulling heavily upon it, thus jerking the sentinel close before him. Then the hunter's right hand swiftly rose and descended, clasping something that shone brightly in the clear moonlight.

With one half-stifled, gurgling cry, the outlaw staggered

back, a hand pressed convulsively to his breast, from which the hot life-blood issued in jets. Only the one blow was needed. Even as his form touched the ground, the life of the outlaw fled.

After a quick glance around him to make sure that no other enemy was within sight, Crockett bent over the corpse. Then, assured that his work was well performed, he dragged the body to one side, where the shade would conceal it temporarily from view.

As he pushed open the wattled door, a low cry greeted him, and Crockett knew that Amy had witnessed, or at least heard, the tragedy that had just been enacted.

"Hist! don't be skeered—it's only me, Miss. I've come to help you free. The young feller is off already—I've got horses out here for the trip. Come!"

"But how do I know—you are a stranger to me," faltered Amy, distracted by doubts.

"Miss, I'm a man—I never lied to a woman in my life. I tell you I'm a friend—that I'm here to save you, and if I'm discovered my life wouldn't be worth a pinch o' burnt powder. I pledge you my honor—the word o' Davy Crockett—"

"Are you Davy Crockett?" eagerly.

"All that politics has left o' him."

"Then I'll trust you. I've heard father speak of you often. I know you will not deceive me."

"It seems that's a good deal in a name, after all," laughed Crockett. "But come—the quicker we're free o' this confounded trap, the safer my hair 'll feel."

Without farther doubt, Amy Richmond followed the lead of Crockett across the glide, and in another instant they were beside the corral. Assisting Amy into the saddle, Davy mounted, then led the way through the chaparral.

A few moments brought them to the edge, when Crockett abruptly paused. Out upon the moonlighted prairie he could detect several figures, both of footmen and of horses. They were scattered over the prairie, carefully beating through the grass and weeds that here rose nearly to the waist.

A hissing curse broke from Crockett's lips. He saw that to emerge from the chaparral would be fatal to his hopes of rescuing Amy. Discovery could not be avoided, and the

Wolves were so stationed as to cut off his crossing the barranca.

"We must take to the bush, then, until a better chance," he muttered, half to himself. "I'd be rough-riding, but better than being in his hands."

"I can stand it—any thing—only do not desert me!" pleaded Amy, the threats of the Frontier Wolf rising fresh before her mind.

"Desert ain't my name, child," quietly added Davy. "You leave my word. I'll take you safe to your friends, or go under in the trying. But you must keep your courage, and mind just what I say, without axing too many questions."

"Only tell me what I have to do, and I'll obey if I can."

"Good! then keep close behind me. We must take to the brush ag'in. Maybe we can strike some trail through it that 'll take us safe acrost. Come, now."

Crockett turned his horse's head and retraced his steps to the glade. It was still unoccupied by night of human life, at least that he could discover. Crossing this, he entered one of the trails that he had observed during the day before, and rode on as rapidly as the circumstances would admit.

Naturally their progress was slow, for the narrow trail wound feverishly through the trees and bushes, at times forcing the riders to lay flat along their horses' necks in order to avoid the low-hanging limbs and vines. Even then they did not escape many rude scratches and disagreeable thumps, but they were fighting for freedom—if not life itself—and cared but little of that, only as it seemed to delay their progress.

Even Davy Crockett, born woodman though he was, soon became utterly bewildered by the many turnings and curves in the rude trail, losing all idea of the direction they were pursuing, or whether they were not wandering in a circle instead of increasing the distance that divided them from the human wolves. Still he did not forget that the instinct of his horse was better to be trusted in such a matter than his own skill, since the darkness rendered eyesight almost totally useless.

Thus they wandered blindly on for fully an hour, though the time seemed doubly long to their anxious minds. At intervals Crockett spoke a few cheering words to Amy, in order to rouse her sinking spirits, but his own hopes were momentarily growing less and less. It seemed as though they were treading some endless labyrinth blindfold. Even by daylight the task would have been no easy one; by night it was almost impossible—quite so only for the instinct of the horses.

At length, when even Crockett had given up all hopes of finding their way out of the chaparral, the timber and undergrowth grew less dense, and an occasional glimpse of the twinkling stars could be had. Thus cheered, they urged on their horses, and a few minutes later emerged from the chaparral.

"Thank God!" murmured Amy, raising her clasped hands.

"Amen!" said Crockett, at the same time casting a quick glance around him.

A rolling prairie lay before them, only broken here and there by small timber islands. Not a living object could be seen, save the two fugitives and their horses.

"Well," at length uttered Crockett, with a cheerful laugh, "we're safe from them varmints, for a time anyhow. We're on the other side—the chaparral lays between us and them. The critter took us straight through it, I reckon."

"How can you tell? It all looks strange to me," faltered the maiden.

"The stars and moon tell me that plain enough. But now what comes next?—that's the question just now. 'T' I only knowed the lay of the ground better. These parts is strange to me. But you—no, the you can set me right."

"I fear not. I have never passed far from home, and then we have not lived long here. This is the first time I was ever on this side of the barranca."

"And how can you cross—the river? I come up the other side, and I don't know how to cross it. How long is it?"

"M—just how many I don't know. There are two crossings—or bridges, as they are called, but whether I passed over the upper or lower, I don't know."

"Well, *t'other* is the one we want, seeing them imps 'll be ranging round the one I used, hunting for what I trust they won't find. We've got to go it blind for this time, and either find a crossing in this direction, or go round the ditch altogether. Come, keep up your courage. I trust we're through the wust o' the job. And now for a gallop. Lucky we've got good critters."

Crockett led the way along the edge of the chaparral, knowing that its course was parallel with that of the barranca, and at the same time would offer a snug place of concealment in case any enemies should appear in view.

The moon had set, morning was close at hand ere the end of the chaparral was gained. No very extensive view was afforded Crockett, owing to the uncertain light, but so far as he could see, nothing suspicious confronted them. Neither was the barranca in sight.

As this must hereafter be their guide, at least until a crossing was found, Crockett's next move was to find it. Wishing to either cross or round its head before day fairly dawned, the hunter did not pause for more than a moment, though Amy gave evidence of being sadly wearied.

Riding away from the timber, bearing to the left, Davy knew that in time he must come upon the desired landmark. This he did, and much sooner than he had hoped for. Within half a mile from the chaparral's edge, he paused upon the brink of the barranca, at this point even wider than where he had first beheld it. Its depth could not be fathomed through the darkness.

"You're sadly needing rest, poor child," gently said the hunter, turning to Amy, who sat listlessly in the saddle, her head drooping upon her breast, "and you shall have a little bit, though the risk was twicet as great. Let me help you down."

"No—I will bear up—I am afraid here. Those fearful men may come up—I can not rest until I am safe at home."

"Only for a little bit—and mebbe 'twill be the shortest trail to your home, after all. Ye see I'm goin' to take a look along this gully, to see 'f we cain't find some way to git over it, shorter 'n going clear round it. I won't be

gone long, but you mought as well be resting as not. Come—let me help you down," said Crockett, in a decided tone that the wearied maiden could not resist.

Gently lifting Amy to the ground, Davy then secured the horses to a stout bush that grew near. An expression of pity crossed his face as he noted her now. Completely exhausted, she had fallen asleep almost ere her body touched the soft sward.

Davy glided to the edge of the barranca and peered eagerly down into its depths. Just below where he was kneeling, only several yards distant, he saw a narrow ledge, though what came below this, he could not tell.

"Only for the gal—but what 'm I saying? Only for her I wouldn't want to cross. Still, with a stout rope, it *might* be done. Well, I'll try further. She's too big game to risk idly."

For probably half a mile Crockett followed the course of the barranca, in the direction heading toward the camp of the outlaws, but without finding any place which might afford a crossing for a woman like Amy. Resolving to ride on as first intended, Davy turned and retraced his steps.

Probably half the distance had been covered, when he abruptly paused and peered eagerly to the right of and something behind his present position. Faintly outlined in the gray glimmer that told of approaching day-dawn, he could just discover the figures of three horsemen, riding in a gallop, and undoubtedly heading toward the point where he had left Amy. It was the faint echo of their hoofs that had at first arrested his attention.

"Cross the back I they've sighted the critters! They're some o' our good friends the boss-thieves, I make no doubt. Now, Davy—it's two legs aginst four—so do your best!"

With rifle braced in one hand, Crockett threw forward his chest and darted toward the spot where he had left Amy, with the speed of a race-horse. Every muscle was put to its utmost tension; he ran as he had never ran before during the whole of his eventful career.

A wild yell from the horsemen told that he was discovered, and in the one glance that Crockett cast to that side, he saw them urging their horses on at full speed, apparent-

ly intent upon cutting him off. With clenched teeth he bounded on, almost flying over the dew-wet grass, so rapidly did his feet move.

Fortunately the brush was a short one, else he must have failed from the very violence of his exertions. Yet he did reach the horses before the three riders were within rifle-shot of the spot.

Amy still slumbered heavily, undisturbed by the thundering of hoofs, or the snorting of the horses tethered close beside her. In one glance Crockett read the truth.

He could not awaken the maiden and place her in the saddle before the enemy were upon them. So flight was out of the question. Nothing remained but to surrender or fight—and the last alternative was the one he chose, though the odds were great.

Still, not so great as might have been. He was well skilled, thoroughly armed, and fought with a rope round his neck. He had recognized these men as belonging to the outlaw band. Even if they did not already know of his deeds in freeing the captives, the presence of Amy would proclaim them. And then—since he had voluntarily joined the league, the doom of a traitor would be his reward.

Nothing daunted by the odds, Crockett dropped to one knee and raised his rifle. To all his nerves, somewhat shaken by his tremendous exertions, he rested his elbow upon his knee.

Either taken by surprise at this bold demonstration, or else feeling perfectly sure of their victims, the Wolves slackened their pace and rode at a hand-gallop. Better for them, perhaps, had they dashed in at once, since then the bold fugitive might not have had time for more than one shot.

Steady as the finger of fate, the rifle-muzzle covered the broad chest of the foremost outlaw, and then, his eyes glittering with a deadly fire, Crockett pressed the trigger. As the weapon spoke, he sprang back, a pistol clapped in either hand.

The marked outlaw uttered a shrill cry of agony, and flung aloft his arms, falling backward from the saddle, his sinewy limbs quivering in the death-throes.

The two survivors did not hesitate, but drew their pistols

and fired as they rushed in. The hunter heard a snort of pain behind him, and then a piercing scream from Andy, and he did not turn to learn the extent of the injury. To do so would be fatal.

Quickly following each other his pistols spoke. The pistol that sped true to its mark. Another outlaw fell, death-stricken.

Almost at the same instant Crockett felt a severe twinge in his left shoulder, and, in consequence, his aim with that hand was disturbed. Still the outlaw fell—but the next moment was upon his feet, knife in hand.

His horse lay struggling upon the ground. The bullet had broken his fore leg.

It was now man to man, with equal weapons. Neither man hesitated for a moment, but with clenched teeth and hate-discounted features rushed madly upon each other.

The short but heavy weapons clashed grimly together—then, with crossed blades, the antagonists paused. Their inflamed eyes glared into each other. They more nearly resembled devils in human form than rational men.

"You killed my brother up there!" gritted the outlaw. "I'll kill you now—cuss ye!"

"If I did 'twas in the way of business," quietly retorted Crockett, bearing heavily upon his knife, which pressure was resisted by the maddened outlaw.

Suddenly Davy jerked his knife free, at the same moment crushing him down. The ruse succeeded, as he believed it would.

All resistance thus abruptly removed, the outlaw staggered forward from the force of his own pressure, and stumbled over the crushing form. Then, ere the man could recover his balance, Crockett springing to his feet and plunged his weapon downward with all the power of his strong arm, full upon the unprotected back of the outlaw.

Through bone and flesh the keen-pointed blade passed, until its haft struck heavily against the body. Without a groan the stricken man fell upon his face. One convulsive shudder, and his nerves relaxed. He was dead!

Without trying to remove his knife, Davy glanced hurriedly around. A wild cry broke from his lips.

The horse lately ridden by Davy lay dead upon the ground, The maiden was not to be seen. She had vanished as though swallowed up by the earth!

Crockett stood as though petrified. The body of the horse covered the exact spot where he had last seen Amy lying asleep. He feared she had been crushed beneath the carcass of the animal.

With a power lent by the thought, Davy rolled the body over; but what he feared to see was not there. A swift glance around told him the truth.

Awakened from a sound sleep by the rattle of firearms, Amy had sprung to her feet, and fled from the spot. Instinctively choosing the course that would carry her directly away from the combatants, she had fallen into the barranca.

Springing forward, Crockett knelt beside the brink, and eagerly gazed downward. He saw that his surmise was the true one. Upon the ledge below crouched Amy Richmond.

A narrow escape had been hers. Even as the ground gave way beneath her feet, she sought to spring back from the unknown depth that lay before her. Falling, partially hanging over the edge, she clutched at the grass in the vain hope that it would sustain her weight. As the earth gradually crumbled away beneath her body, the grass-roots slowly yielded, and then she fell down—alighting in safety upon the little ledge before alluded to. Fortunately her presence of mind did not entirely desert her, and she remained motionless, fearing to stir a limb lest she should be dashed down into the dark depth, fearing to raise her voice in an appeal for help, lest her enemies, the outlaws, had proven victors in the strife, and be the only ones to hear her appeal.

"Speak, little 'un," cried Crockett, bending over the escarpment, his voice trembling with eagerness and illy-suppressed fear, "say you're all right. It's me, Davy Crockett; you shain't be hurt."

"But—those men—"

"They're gone away—they won't trouble us no more. But, sure ye ain't hurt?"

"Only a little bruised—I believe that is all. But the wall is smooth and almost straight up. How can I get up from here?"

Davy glanced around before answering. The two uninjured horses that had been ridden by the Wolves were not in sight. They had fled the instant relieved from their riders. The black stallion was still tethered, though snorting and pawing the ground uneasily. Daniel Cloud's horse lay dead upon the ground—farther on the crippled mustang lay.

A glance showed these facts—but the gaze of our hero became fixed upon a point far up the barranca, midway between it and the chaparral. In the gray light of dawn he could distinguish the forms of horsemen—and that they were rapidly approaching he could not long doubt. The sound of fire-arms had attracted their attention.

Davy acted promptly, knowing that he could not raise Amy from the ledge in time to flee with her. He jerked the saddle-blanket from the dead horse, then stripped off its bridle, and dropped them down the ledge, crying:

"The varmints is coming. Cover yourself up 's well's you can. I'll lead them away from here, then come back for you. Don't fret—if I live I'll see you safe through this."

Quickly securing his weapons, Crockett loosed his black steed, leaped into the saddle, and dashed away at full speed, leading down the barranca, and a mile or more behind him thundered on the outlaws.

CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER VICTORY—DEFEAT.

As he fled, Davy Crockett was far from being at ease concerning the fate of the maiden he was forced to abandon. He feared that she was doomed to fall into the hands of the Frontier Wolf, after all his plottings and bloodshed.

He knew that the outlaw must have discovered the part he had played in the events of the past night, that he had fled with Amy. Even if Cyrus Norton had not been recaptured

ere this, they well knew that he had fled upon foot. Then the sight of the black horse now would tell them its rider. And seeing him flee *alone*, would not some of the outlaws pause at the spot where the flight had taken place to search for the missing maiden? And should they do so, discovery was inevitable. Amy would be recaptured, and even worse, fall into the hands of the Frontier Wolf.

While these thoughts flashed across Crockett's mind, with them came others. He felt assured that upon the noble black he could hold his own with, if not distance, those in pursuit, and once over the barranca he could soon find friends and allies among the honest settlers. With them to aid him, he would return and fulfill his pledge. Come what might, he could not desert the maiden who had confided in him.

From time to time he glanced over his shoulder, with anxiously beating heart. To his great joy he saw the outlaws press on in hot pursuit, with scarcely a moment's pause at the spot where the fight had taken place. They seemed to have only thought for the slayer of their comrades.

"'F I can only keep 'em after me long enough, the gal is safe," muttered Crockett, tightening his grasp upon the reins.

The noble black settled down into a long, steady gallop that maintained, without increasing, the distance between the fugitive and pursuers. Satisfied with this, Davy knotted the reins, and then carefully began reloading his weapons.

A glance back at the retreat of the Frontier Wolf, may help to explain several points. The discovery of Amy's rescue was not made until the outlaw chief returned from his ride after the hermit priest. Then he found the guard dead and his captive gone.

The vicinity was closely searched by the men he recalled from the prairie, but nothing was found except several of the women who had fled into the chaparral at the first alarm. From these Davis learned who had rescued Amy. Two of them had seen Crockett pass by on horseback, plunging into the depths of the chaparral. They also pointed out the trail he had taken.

Along this Dabois and his men—such as had not scattered in pursuit of Cyrus Norton—followed; but, fortunately for our friends, they knew the lay of the ground better, and struck into the trail that led toward the upper crossing, feeling assured that Crockett would take the shortest route to safety. Thus they were thrown entirely off the scent.

None of the outlaws who had thus far come across the fugitives, had known of the real facts. At first the trio first dealt with had believed they beheld Cyrus Norton. The second party fell into the same error, nor did they find their mistake until after passing the spot where lay their dead comrades, when the increasing light revealed their mistake. Still they pressed on, burning to avenge the blood of their friends.

Before another mile was traversed, Davy Crockett had his weapons reloaded and ready for use. And then he made a most disagreeable discovery.

He fancied that his horse ran with difficulty, far different from its usual deer-like bounds. And now as he looked close he saw that its neck was no longer arched, that its pointed ears drooped forward, and occasionally the long, flowing tail was sharply switched from side to side.

It could not be mere fatigue, though he had ridden long and hard; and that was but a mere blurb for a prairie-bred horse. And it was now, as he realized the truth, Davy felt his heart rise to his throat, bold as he undeniably was.

The neck and breast of the laboring black shone strangely in the gray light of dawn. The hair was wet and shiny, even down to its hoof.

Pressing forward, Crockett passed one hand over this mysterious spot. As he raised it again, a dark, red stain met his gaze. *It was blood.*

At the base of its neck, just before the shoulder, the blood-stain began. With a finger Davy probed the hurt. The wound had passed deep into the animal's chest.

The same volley that had killed Clark's horse must have wounded the black stallion. And Crockett knew that the race was almost run, as he felt the animal's frame trembling beneath him.

Crockett tore a strip from his tunic and pressed it firmly

into the wound, though he knew that this could avail but little. Then he turned and glanced back.

He could count his pursuers now—seven in number. The odds were great, yet he never once thought of surrendering. To do so would be certain death; to resist might result the same, but he would not fall unavenged. Death should have other victims as well.

Before him nothing could be seen save the rolling prairie and the round disk of the sun, just topping the swell. While loading he had allowed the horse its own way, and now the barranca was no longer to be seen.

With tightened reins, the fugitive aided his laboring horse to the best of his skill, hoping to reach some cover—a timber island, if possible, that loomed up before him at perhaps a mile away—before the black should give way. But the end was even nearer than he had thought.

Loud, exultant shouts broke from the pursuers, and turning his head, Crockett saw them slacken in their pace and scatter to the right and left. Suspecting the truth, he glanced keenly before him.

A faint zig zag line met his eye, crossing the green sward, in shape much like an abrupt crescent. Before him, to the right and left, the dark line extended. He was already where a line drawn from point to point of the crescent would pass.

That line was the barranca. He had run blindly into a trap—a *cul de sac*.

All retreat was cut off. The outlaws were nearer either end than he was. Upon his crippled horse, he could not hope to break through their ranks and flee. At the most, five minutes more must end the poor black.

These thoughts flashed like lightning upon Crockett's mind. Without a moment's hesitation his resolve was taken, and he urged the black stallion on.

Drawing rein at the very brink of the barranca, he sprang from his saddle and leveled his rifle over the back of his horse. With one accord the outlaws paused, just without range. They did not fancy rushing forward when death must come to some of their number. That this was no common enemy to deal with, the scene of death upon the prairie yonder but too plainly evidenced.

Seeing them hesitate, then draw together to consult, Davy stepped back and peered down into the barranca. Little hope was to be gleaned here.

The banks were almost perpendicular, and full thirty feet high. The bottom was thickly bestrewn with bowlders of every size and shape, affording many a snug covert, were one only at the bottom.

A voice from the prairie withdrew Davy's attention from the barranca. One of the outlaws had advanced a little, shielding his precious body behind his horse, having dismounted.

"Hellow yourself?" retorted Crockett, once more leveling his rifle.

"Look here—what's the use in bein' a durned fool? We've got you in a trap, safe enough. Act sensible, give up, an' you'll be treated well," continued the spokesman.

"Who are you, anyhow?" demanded Crockett, his eyes suddenly flashing as he believed he detected the real object of this parley.

"You know—you j'ined our band."

All the Wolves had dismounted, and had their horses huddled in a group, save the exception noted. And now Davy knew that his suspicions were correct. Five men stood by the horses. The spokesman made six—where was the seventh?

Crawling stealthily along through the rank grass, hoping to gain a shot at the bold hunter, without risk, thus ending the matter comfortably. This Davy knew as well as though he had witnessed the entire move.

Suspecting this, he had loaded his rifle. Knowing its truth now, he resolved to be the one to deal the first blow.

The spokesman was just within range, as Davy knew. Feeling confident both in his own skill and the merit of his rifle, he drew a careful bead upon the outlaw, the upper portion of whose face was revealed above the deep-seated saddle.

The weapon spoke. The outlaw flung up his hands and staggered back, the black blood oozing from a tiny hole directly between the eyes. Then he fell to the ground, dead.

For a moment the outlaws glanced at his body in mute

amazement. Then, with ready weapons, they sprung forward, uttering angry cries and bitter curses.

They pause—their cries hushed, their faces blanched. A feeling of terror fell upon them.

A tiny cloud of smoke floats upon the air. Beneath it, lying prone upon the ground, is the form of a black horse, motionless as though dead. But where is the man who fired the death-shot? The grass at the edge of the barranca is short and scanty. A snake could scarcely have found shelter there—much less the form of a human being.

Even as he touched the trigger, Crockett saw that the stallion was falling. Instantly springing back, he turned and leaped boldly down into the barranca. The shock was fearful, but the knowledge of how much depended upon his life, helped to arouse him, and he crawled forward to the mass of bowlders at the opposite side, where he found a spot where he could be almost altogether hidden from view of those above, yet able to watch the bank, and fire at will.

The outlaws had gained a point from which they could see that no man lay behind the dead horse, and, wild with rage, they rushed forward in a body, for the moment entirely forgetting their natural dread of their enemy's skill. And peering down into the barranca, one of them caught sight of the dark figure half-hidden among the bowlders.

Instantly his rifle rose, and he fired. Like an echo came a report from below. With a yell of pain, one of the outlaws reeled back, an arm dangling helplessly at his side. Crockett raised his second pistol, but lowered it without firing. With one accord the Wolves had sprung back beyond his view.

Needless here to detail the next two hours' work. The outlaws, using every art to approach Davy and to draw him out of his covert failed, and two, at least, paid the penalty of their lives for their temerity in pressing the desperate man; and Davy himself was stunned and scorched by a ball, which, striking the rock near his head, sent the splintered fragments flying into his face, and soon the blood almost blinded his sight. Just then, however, when it was certain the outlaws were ready for a rush upon him, he heard a wild scampering of horses, and, to his amazement, a new company of men rode into view. These he found were the settlers

out on the man hunt, and forthwith the old bear-hunter was relieved from his perilous situation.

A lasso was cast down, and by it Davy was quickly drawn up from the barren. His battered appearance was greeted even a yell of wild laughter, by full a score of horsemen. And truly he was not in the best of plights.

"Who are you, anyhow?" demanded the man who seemed to act as leader of the party.

"Well if my face was washed, and I had on some clean clothes, and something to fill up the holder *here*," clapping one hand above his belt, "I'd say I was Davy Crockett."

"What! not Cannel Crockett—not *the* Davy?"

"The only one I ever heard of, anyhow," laughed the great bear-hunter, not a little gratified by this proof of his widespread popularity.

There followed a scene of ludicrous hilarity. The settlers crowded around the hunter, each eager to clasp his hand, each with some word of glad greeting. Many themselves, they were glad to meet one who had so often proved his right to this title. It was here, as everywhere throughout the West, Davy Crockett was a "household name," and no man living could number more true friends than he. Only in political circles had he *enemies*.

Crockett finally managed to learn the cause of this gathering. Rumor had been found insensible on the prairie, a mile from his house, at nearly midnight, by a passing scout. He had sunk beneath the loss of blood. Finally he recovered sufficiently to tell his story, and then the tidings was spread far and wide, the strong armed settlers answering the call to a man. For Andy was a general favorite among both single and married. The band divided into two parties, when the girl was lost. This section had captured two outlaws, and on their own confession, "put them out of the way." Then attracted by the sound of firing, they came up, catching the surviving outlaws in their own trap, not one of them escaping. As they said, "there was come for a clean sweep."

The girl was given over to Davy tell his story; that he had helped Andy. Andy was known true. The next morning the hunter was mounted upon one of the captured horses, and led the way at a gallop toward the spot where he had left Andy.

As he rode away, Crockett munched upon some meat and bread, washed down with an occasional swallow from a rubber flask.

The spot was easily found—for a score of black-winged scavengers flapped heavily away from the horrible feast. Leaping to the ground, Davy peered over the bank. He staggered back with a wild cry. Amy Richmond was no longer there!

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAN-HUNT.

It becomes necessary now to take up the thread of Cyrus Norton's adventures, one who has, perhaps, been too long neglected.

As he involuntarily paused beside the hut that had for hours been his prison-house, the body of Ben Rose still quivering at his feet, with broad breast bathed in gore, the young settler realized the extent of his danger. Directed by the death-yell, the eyes of all the outlaws were now turned toward where he stood.

Norton saw now that the plan sketched by Crockett could not be carried out—and so he trusted to his own wit. Turning, he plunged into the underbrush, and in a few moments gaining the beaten trail, then darting at dangerous speed toward the open ground beyond.

Above the sound of his own footsteps he could hear the wild cries of the outlaws, as they pressed forward in hot pursuit—and among other words the shouts for horses. Reaching the edge of the prairie, he turned to the right and ran swiftly for a hundred yards, then plunged into the chaparral once more, lying low beneath a dense, scrubby bush.

From this he could peer out upon the moonlighted prairie, and almost laughed aloud as he saw the human Wolves break cover and then pause with wondering cries, evidently amazed at his sudden disappearance. Then they scattered and began quartering over the ground.

The grass was thick and nearly breast-high. Nothing could be easier than for a man to hide amidst it. And this was what the outlaws believed Norton had done.

During his brief grapple with Ben Rose, the young settler had dropped his rifle, and knowing that, in all probability, a race for life lay before him, he had not stooped to recover it. The stout knife and brace of pistols at his waist would be weapons enough.

Knowing that discovery must come sooner or later, did he remain where he was, Cyrus cautiously glided away, keeping close to the edge of the chaparral where the dense shade cast by the tall trees served him as additional cover. But his escape was not to be so easily effected.

Working his way toward the barranca, he found every avenue of approach guarded by the horsemen, whose leader well understood what avenue of escape the flying man must pursue. Thus Norton was compelled again to face death. With set teeth and a heart firm as steel, he executed a quickly-formed resolve—to shoot one of the horsemen down, mount his horse, and ride a race for life direct for the barranca. The feat was performed, aided as it was, by the friendly cover of the long grass and the dimness of the light; the horseman was pistoled, the beast mounted, and, with a wild pack of fiends on his track, the desperate man dashed for the only shelter.

It was gained amid a very shower of bullets—one of which pierced the now wild mustang which bore him on; and with an almost human shriek of agony, the beast leaped out into nothingness, held firmly in its upright position by the strong hand of its self-possessed rider.

The foremost outlaws leaped from their saddles and peered over the escarpment. The bottom of the barranca was hidden from their view. All below was intense darkness.

They listened intently, their frames thrilling at the thought of such a mad leap. Bold men themselves, a peculiar sense of admiration was awakened by this deed.

No sound came from below. All was still as death. And yet there was little to wonder at in that. The miracle would have been, had either horse or rider survived the terrible leap.

A bunch of grass was ignited and flung over the bank. Slowly it coiled in spiral circles, and then touched the rocky bottom, blazing feebly for a moment before expiring.

The outlaws exchanged glances of relief. By the transient gleam they had made out the form of the horse lying in a heap—beyond this, a few feet off, as though thrown over the animal's head, lay the form of the young settler, motionless, with limbs in an unnatural position.

"The varmint's dead," muttered one of the outlaws, drawing back from the edge. "It's 'most a pity, too, though he did kill the boys. He was a reg'lar d'r'-devil!"

"Dead enough, in course, but then you know the cap'n. He won't be satisfied 'thout he sees it for himself," added another.

"We kin go up to the crossin', an' then down the gully a'ter it. I don't reckon thar's much fear o' his runnin' away, is thar?" and the speaker laughed heartily.

An hour later they reached the point of the perilous leap. There lay the dead body of the mustang, but the body they sought for was gone. Not a trace, in the darkness of the night, could they find of the man who had so strangely vanished.

Nothing remained but to procure torches for the search, and when at length the torch-bearers arrived, two good hours had been given the young settler for his escape down the rocky pass.

Stunned to unconsciousness by the first shock of the fall, Cyrus had ere long regained his senses, and realizing that his only hope lay in flight down the gully, he worked his way onward for several hours, until, exhausted and sore in every limb, he resolved to "turn in" at the first good hiding-place that offered, there to rest and run the risk of discovery should the outlaws follow down the barranca.

This covert he soon espied, and with difficulty clambered up to it, being a broad ledge nearly half-way up the bank, screened in front by several large boulders. Behind these he dropped, and in a few moments was buried in the soft sleep of an almost utterly exhausted frame.

But the fugitive was not to be disturbed that night. While the outlaws were yet searching for his body, the Frontier

Wolf returned with the hermit priest, and, as narrated, discovered the second rescue. Wild with rage, he gave no further thought to the young settler, but urged on every man to search for the daring spy, and the maiden. So the barranca was left unsearched, and Cyrus Norton slept on. Nor did the sounds of firing and yells consequent upon Davy Crockett's first conflict with the Wolves, arouse him, though transpiring within a short half-mile of where he lay.

He never knew what it was that did awaken him, but all at once he sat up, with eyes wide open, and every sense upon the alert. It was day—the rays of the sun were already tinging the opposite edge of the barranca.

A faint noise met his ear, coming from the barranca bed. With ready weapons he cautiously peered over the rocky breastwork.

A human being was wearily toiling along the rugged path. The figure of a woman and a pale-face.

With heart throbbing rapidly, Norton waited. Then the woman raised a hand and flung back the heavy hair that hung down her shoulders. Only a glimpse of her face met his eye, but that was ample.

"Amy! Thank God!" he cried, and sprung to his feet.

The maiden started at the sound of a voice, and half turned to flee, but then she recognized the young man, and uttered a low, eager cry. In another moment he was beside her, his arm wound round her form, his lips raining kisses upon her pallid face.

In that moment all else was forgotten; neither gave thought to enemies or danger. But they were quickly awakened to a sense of their situation.

Amy first caught sound of the thud of horses' hoofs, and, with a loud cry of fear, started back. Raising his eyes, Norton beheld half a dozen horsemen riding close along the edge of the barranca, yet several hundred yards above where they stood.

With a strength lent by desperation, Cyrus caught Amy up in his arms and clambered over the boulders to the ledge upon which he had slept so soundly. This movement did not escape the eyes of the horsemen, who, with exultant shouts

dashed rapidly down until opposite the ledge, brandishing their weapons and calling upon the settler to surrender.

Cyrus cocked and leveled his pistols over the boulder. Amy lay low down, completely shielded from harm. No bullet could reach her from where the outlaws stood.

"If I surrender, what then?" demanded Norton.

"No back talk. Throw down your weapons!" angrily cried Moncton.

"I'll give you the bullets in them first," muttered Cyrus, as his eye ranged along the barrel.

The outlaws evidently believed their force would scare the settler, and so took no precaution to guard against a shot. Thus Norton could choose his target.

As his pistol cracked, Moncton uttered a yell of pain and swayed in his saddle. Alarmed, his horse kicked and plunged madly, soon casting the stricken man from the saddle.

As the others rushed to assist their leader, Cyrus fired again, and once more his aim was successful.

With a hurried volley the survivors turned and galloped back out of view.

CHAPTER X.

THE WOLF AT BAY.

DAVY CROCKETT peered down upon the ledge, but Amy Richmond was no longer there. But then, after the first start of surprise, he read the enigma.

The stout, long rein of plaited horse-hair was tied by one end to a point of rock, then dangled down below the ledge. By this means he knew that Amy had gained the bottom of the barranca in safety.

But in which direction were they to look for her? Had she ventured up the barranca bed, or down it? The one course would carry her nearer her home, but closer to her enemies as well, while every step taken in the other would lead her further from her people.

"That's a answer, I reckon," abruptly muttered a grizzled

borderer, keenly gazing up the barranca. "One—two—half a dozen shots. Powder burns free thar!"

"Close at hand, too—then, like's not the gal tuck that route—reckon we'd better ride up thar. Anyhow thar's fun ahead, an' we're gittin' our hands in."

"May as well. But don't run away from me—this plug's most played," yelled Crockett, spurring his jaded beast on with a knife-point.

As the reader knows, this alarm was made by the shots fired by and at Cyrus Norton. The lay of the ground now favored the settlers, and though the prairie was devoid of all trees and shrubs, save such as formed the chaparral, half a mile to the left, a swell in the ground kept them hid until within fair rifle-shot of the Wolves.

These had dismounted and were gathered around their wounded chief, who was breathing his last. Thus the settlers gained the summit and began descending the swell before the sound of their horses' feet alarmed the game.

With yells of terror the outlaws sprung to their horses, knowing that in flight alone lay safety. But their very haste proved fatal, since it alarmed the half-tamed mustangs, who sprung away over the prairie, snorting wildly.

The settlers yelled with triumph at this event. The outlaws gave vent to cries of terror. But then Moncton rose upon one elbow, shouting in a husky voice:

"Down in the grass, ye fools! to cover, and make them pay a dear price for your lives!"

These words were his last. With a gurgling groan his head sank back, the blood gushing from his lips in a crimson stream. Though hardened and crime-stained, a braver man never lived.

"Hold on, boys!" shouted Crockett, as he saw the four Wolves sink down into the rank grass, obedient to the words of their dying leader. "They're our meat safe enough, but they're sc'cely worth wasting two or three honest men's lives on. Since they've tuck to cover let's smoke 'em out!"

This speech was greeted with wild applause. There was something in the idea that just suited their passions, now fairly roused.

"Some guard the barranca yender—others spread out so's to surround the varmints, but keep out o' short range. They won't try long shots, s'ee they know ther'll be no time to load. Quick, now, or they'll sneak off through the grass."

Crockett led the way, sweeping round the hidden outlaws at a safe distance, leaving his men at regular intervals, until the surround was complete. Then dismounting, they hopped their horses, or staked them out.

Crockett had selected the side from which the wind—though gentle, there was sufficient for his purpose—came, and quickly preparing his tinder—a bunch of grass covered with dampened powder, he flashed a pistol into it. Swinging the fizzing mass round his head, it burst into a bright flame, and stooping, he touched it to the dried grass. This blazed up like tinder. Running rapidly along, he ignited the grass in a score of places, wide enough to cover the circle inclosed by the settlers.

"Eyes open, boys," he yelled, half mad with excitement. **"Take the varmints on the wing!"**

Around the circle stood the settlers, with cocked and ready rifles, eagerly waiting for the human game to break cover. There was a horrible fascination in this thought. It was a new method of hunting their enemies.

Slowly and deliberately the fire burned, for the grass was dense and damp nearer the ground. The heavy black smoke rose almost straight, so faint was the breeze. Yet the fire was amply fierce enough to answer the purpose, and added to the fascination by prolonging the suspense.

Driven before the fire—the heat of which began to be felt even as they lay upon the damp ground—the outlaws, though unseen, crept nearer the barranca, where the grass was shorter. Then, fearing to venture further lest they should expose themselves, they waited with clenched teeth and brows black with despairing hatred.

The fire crept on—the settlers began to grow impatient. They began uttering loud taunts and jeers; but the outlaws bided their time.

But soon this became impossible. Then they exchanged glances. Already they had picked their men—those nearest the barranca.

Their garments began to shrivel and smoke before the heat. Then their rifles rose from the grass. The friendly smoke hid the movement.

Four reports sounded as one—and then, dropping their rifles, the hunted men leaped to their feet and darted toward the barranca. Though anticipating just such a move, the settlers for a moment seemed paralyzed, and allowed the fugitives to cross one half of the distance.

Then the rifles began to speak, one by one. Two men fell side by side. A third dropped in the throes of death a few steps further on. The last gained the edge of the barranca, and uttering a defiant yell, shaking his clenched fist on high, leaped boldly outward.

A dull thud—then silence, save for the crackling of the flames devouring the prairie grass.

The settlers rushed to the edge and gazed downward, with ready pistols. The body lay upon the rocks without motion. Beyond all doubt the outlaw was dead.

But at what a loss to the settlers. Until now, they had not realized it; the smoke cloud had helped to hide the truth.

Four of their number lay upon the ground, three still and stark in death; the other writhing in agony. Each one of the outlaws had avenged himself.

“Hallo, up there!”

The cry caused them a start of surprise. In the excitement they had forgotten that the outlaws had been engaged with other parties when they came up. Each man turned toward the barranca, from whence the cry proceeded.

Two figures met their gaze; that of a man, with a woman leaning upon his arm. Half-maddened as they were by the sight of their dead and dying comrades, more than one weapon was leveled at the figures. But a strong arm dashed these aside, and the voice of Davy Crockett, cried:

“Are ye blind, not to recognize your own friends? ’Tis those we were hunting—the younger man and Richardson’s girl!”

The stern looks changed into an expression of joy, and for a moment it seemed as though several of the settlers would have leaped down the bank in their eagerness to greet the young couple. For the moment even their great loss was forgotten.

Such are true-born Western men. From one extreme to the other—'tis but a step.

"Drop the end of a lasso—the bank is too steep to climb," cried Norton, helping Amy down from the ledge.

With some little exertion the young couple were landed safely upon the prairie-level. Amy glanced quickly around, shuddering as her eyes rested upon the dead bodies lying upon the bloodstained ground. Her face turned even whiter than before, and she strove in vain to speak.

"The old man didn't come 'th us," ventured one of the settlers, guessing her thoughts. "He's hurt a bit—not much, so don't fret. He'll be up in a day or so."

Fearful lest Amy should make some inquiry after her mother, Norton proposed setting forth. But the dead settlers could not be left for the foul scavengers that were already circling overhead, and the bodies were tied upon horseback.

Amy rode behind Cyrus, as the party proceeded up the barranca. Crockett had already made known the spot used by the Frontier Wolf as a rendezvous, and the settlers resolved to proceed thither, trusting to find the rest of the robbers. Though slow to arouse, they were now bound to make clean work of the job.

The stronghold was found deserted, but the settlers were not satisfied, and determined to wait awhile before destroying the huts and corral, trusting some of the stragglers would return.

Half a dozen escorted Amy and Cyrus over the barranca, and several miles upon their road home—for Richmond had been taken to Norton's, as the dwelling nearest the spot he had been found. Upon the road Cyrus, as tenderly as possible, broke the sad news to Amy that her mother was dead.

While waiting and watching in the chaparral, a rude grave was dug and the dead settlers placed therein, to remain until time would allow their removal to more appropriate resting-places. And thus the day wore on until near nightfall.

One of the men posted at the edge of the chaparral as sentinels, entered the glade in hot haste, saying that a large body of horsemen were approaching from the west. That he believed, they were Indians.

Instantly each man grasped his weapons, then glided to the edge of the prairie. Steadily approaching, now barely a mile distant, was a strong body of men—apparently two score strong—or twice the number of our friends.

Yet in the glances cast around, but one expression could be read. If these were enemies they should not be balked in a fight.

Though the sun was low, the keen-eyed hunters could see that among the savages were a number of white men, and they guessed the truth. The surviving outlaws had joined with their allies, resolved to make one more struggle for supremacy.

At double rifle-shot distance, the party halted, and one brave advanced on foot, evidently as a scout. Dave Crockett smiled as he saw an old man uncoil a lasso from the saddle-tree. The scout must be secured.

Nearing the thicket, the savage sunk down in the grass, then glided on, hidden save for his feather crest. All was still as death within the timber.

Motioning the lasso-man back, Crockett drew his knife and glided forward. Pausing beneath a dense bush, he waited. Not for long. The dark face of the savage was thrust almost against his own.

One sinewy hand shot out and closed upon the red skin's throat. Then the stout knife fell, buried half its length in the shaven skull of the Kioway.

"Theseimps must have their answer," muttered Crockett. "Old man, you're the right build."

The hunter, with a grin, stepped forward and donned the bright calico shirt of the Indian; and then his knife boldly stripped the skin from the brave's skull. This he clapped upon his own head, with a grim laugh, and then stepping cautiously to the edge of the prairie, he raised his hand in signal that the coast was clear.

The settlers laughed as the party promptly advanced, walking blithely into the trap. Strange as it may seem, they never once doubted these were enemies, though nothing had proven them such, since the Indians were nominally at peace. However, Crockett soon recognized one of the foremost riders as the man who called himself the Frontier Wolf.

The Indians came steadily on, noticing nothing, until within fifty yards of the timber. Then Davy Crockett gave the signal for the first half to fire by discharging his own rifle.

Almost immediately after the reserve fired, and then the settlers broke cover, with loud cheers. As they cleared the smoke-cloud, a horrible sight met their eyes. The prairie was covered with bodies, dead and dying. Full one half of the entire band had fallen beneath the withering volleys.

Then their pistols began to speak, as they rushed forward. But the surviving savages did not pause to meet them. With terror-stricken yells they retreated and fled, without firing a single shot. The settlers did not pursue them. For once they were surfeited with blood.

Examining the dead, Crockett found Pierre Dabois, the Frontier Wolf, lying upon his face, a bullet-hole between the eyes. He had died, as he lived, by violence.

Again the suspicion that this man was Will Cloud, came to Crockett, from the strong resemblance to what Daniel Cloud had been in his youth. But the settlers, whom he questioned, declared that he was mistaken.

And pondering over the still unresolved mystery, Davy returned to the camp, leaving the settlers to plan for the dead. Lying bound in one of the huts, our hero found father Darrand, the hermit priest. Setting him free, he next applied the torch to the huts.

When next he looked for the priest, he was not to be found.

CHAPTER XII,

DAVY KEEPS HIS WORD.

WITH the morning dawn, Davy Crockett rode toward the Cloud ranche. His face wore a puzzled expression, and occasionally an exclamation of disgust dropped from his lips.

He began to believe that Daniel Cloud had wilfully lied to him in saying that Hattie had been abducted by the Frontier Wolf. For this suspicion he had several reasons.

If his only daughter had really been stolen away, why had not Cloud interested himself more in her recovery? Though pretending to raise the hunters, he had not done so; not one of the neighbors had seen him, nor did they know of Hattie Cloud's disappearance until told so by Crockett.

An hour later Crockett knocked at the Cloud ranche, finding it closed. To his knocking, no answer was made, and with a muttered curse, he dashed his broad shoulders against the outer door, with such force as to hurl it from its hinges.

The form of Cloud, cowering in one corner, was the first object that met his gaze. An almost stifling odor of bad whisky filled the room. If not exactly in the *delirium tremens*, Cloud was not far from that interesting state.

Still and tremble, Crockett seized the stone jug and hurled it violently out at the door, it going to pieces upon the hard, trampled ground.

"There, Dadd, I've rid you of one enemy, 't any rate. Now, look here. One good turn deserves another. I want you to make a clean breast o' this matter. I know you lied to me t'other day; but you mustn't do it ag'in. Where is your gal, Hattie?"

The drunkard made no reply, though his blood-shot eyes steadily returned the hunter's gaze.

"My name's well, Dadd. Better tell me than Judge Lynch. They'll ask what was the meaning o' those bloody tracks out yonder."

"I didn't kill him—there is no blood on my hand!" cried the wretch, shrinking back, his eyes glowing like those of a wild beast driven to bay.

"Where is Hattie—give me back my love?"

A terrible shriek burst from the drunkard's lips, and he writhed upon the floor in a fit. Crockett quickly turned, drawing a pistol.

A wail came from the doorway. From this the voice had come—hollow, unearthly.

The form was cloaked in white and blood-stained garments, sitting upon the floor. Maud had fallen across his face. A tiny rivulet of blood trickled down over his face.

For a moment Crockett stood in wild amaze. Then, with

a glad cry, he sprung forward, and caught the tottering form in his arms, gently carrying it to the bed.

In that moment he recognized the man. It was, indeed, Tom Ashe, the young hunter who had saved his life from the mad grizzly.

Another shout from without startled Davy, but his fears were relieved as he beheld the stout figure of father Durand hastening toward the house. The hermit priest had traced out his patient.

A groan from the corner where lay the stricken settler, attracted the attention of Crockett and Durand. To Davy's eyes, Cloud seemed dying, but the priest was better versed in such matters, and knew that some heavy shock had driven away the whisky-madness, leaving the brain clear, though weak.

"Look here, Dan'l," cried Crockett, when he comprehended this, "now's your time. Make a clean breast o' it afore you go under, as you hope for mercy hereafter."

"Am I dyin'?" gasped Cloud, in terror.

"Mebbe not—but you *will* if you don't 'fess."

And Daniel Cloud did confess all. His entire statement to Crockett had been one tissue of falsehoods.

That the reader may better understand the matter, I mingle with Cloud's statement the after explanation given by Tom Ashe.

Before meeting Crockett, as mentioned in the opening chapter, Tom Ashe had made an appointment with Hattie Cloud to meet him in secret near the ranche. Though believing his new-found friend to be true, Tom felt averse to confide such a secret to his ear, and so had slipped away from his side as soon as he slept.

To one active as himself, the half-dozen miles that intervened were speedily traversed, and passing behind the lone tree, Ashe uttered the agreed upon signal. A few moments later Hattie Cloud was clasped to his breast.

Early that morning Will Cloud had ridden away, as though bound for the settlements. But this was only a ruse. After nightfall he returned; but his real plan was not to be carried out. His strong will had forced Daniel Cloud to aid in carrying off Amy Richmond.

As he cautiously stole up from the river to arouse his father, Will Cloud observed the lovers standing beneath the tree, earnestly conversing. The eyes of hatred are sharp, and he quickly recognized Tom Ashe.

With a bitter curse, he raised his rifle and fired. The bullet tore through Tom's shoulder, then grazing the tree, as noted by our hero. Ashe fell with a cry of pain. Terrified, Hattie started to flee, but her trembling limbs gave way, and she sunk to the ground.

Will Cloud sprung forward with drawn knife, to finish his enemy. Daniel Cloud, startled by the shot and cry, darted from the house, rifle in hand.

The enemies met—their knives clashed together. Then they grappled. Though wounded, Ashe was no mean antagonist, as young Cloud soon discovered.

Seeing his son's peril, Cloud rushed forward and dealt Ashe a fearful blow upon the head with clubbed rifle. With a groan, he rolled from the body of his foe.

With a fiendish curse, Will Cloud rose to his knees and plunged his knife to the hilt in the young hunter's breast. A convulsive quiver, and then he lay like one dead.

Not until the young man lay at their feet, apparently dead, did they realize the probable consequence of their deed. Tom Ashe was well known around; his family was an influential one. No pains would be spared in tracking down the murderers.

Then it was, taking Will Cloud's well-known departure as a foundation, that a subtle plan was concocted, by which the burden of the crime might be cast upon the outlaws. The body was dragged to the river-bank and thrown into the current. Then Will Cloud carried Hattie, still half-unconscious, to the boat and embarked. Daniel Cloud rode his son's horse half a dozen miles down the river to meet him. Then the boat was sunk, and brother and sister, upon the same horse, rode rapidly toward the settlements, while the father returned on foot to the rancho. Half an hour later Davy Crockett appeared upon the scene, finding his old friend in a terrible condition.

Floating with the current, Tom Ashe was lodged upon the shore where he was found by the hermit priest, exactly as

that person told the Frontier Wolf. To Father Durand's skill, under Heaven, Tom Ashe owed his life.

When released by Crockett, Durand, whose mind was full of his patient, stole away and hastened home at once. Here he found all safe in keeping of the outlaw. To him he lastly narrated the dread fate that had overtaken both band and leader, warning him to flee for his life. The outlaw lost no time in obeying.

Worn and jaded, Durand fell into a sound sleep, during which Tom Ashe awoke in full possession of his senses, and remembering how he had last seen Hattie, hastened at once to Clou's ranche. Awaking, Durand missed his patient, and followed his trail to the prairie; a mile distant was Ashe, running rapidly. Durand followed; both soon gained the ranche.

Crockett's resolve was quickly taken. Tom Ashe had saved his life. He loved Hattie, and his love was returned. And in the attempted murder he saw a chance to gain even Will Cloud's consent to the marriage.

He only had to say the word, and a score of settlers promptly volunteered for duty, only too eager to follow the lead of Davy Crockett. With half a dozen men he rode after Will Cloud, and found that this time Daniel Cloud had spoken the truth. Threats of invoking Judge Lynch promptly silenced all objections that Cloud attempted, and the party returned in triumph, bearing with them the maiden.

For a month longer Crockett tarried in the neighborhood, a lion. Never did he enjoy himself more thoroughly. And he managed to add several more to the list of bears that had fallen by his hand.

Then he danced at a double wedding, where Amy Richmond became Mrs. Cyres Norton, and Hattie Cloud became Mrs. Tom Ashe. Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Cloud were present, perfect winks. Amy's father, too, poked and winked, but out of danger.

Then Davy Crockett bade his friends adieu, promising to pay them another visit some time soon. A promise that, alas! the Alamo massacre rendered impossible. But his memory still lives, nor will it ever die.

Daniel Cloud drank hard to drown the haunting shadow of him whom he had murdered, and within a month after the double wedding, died in a fit of *delirium tremens*. His wife followed him to the grave within the week.

Will Cloud was shot in a gambling-hell in Nacogdoches.

THE END.

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